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ALIA BHATT

GOING GREEN

HOW BOLLYWOOD'S ECO WARRIORS ARE SAVING THE PLANET

TAAPSEE PANNU: Flying high

Covid BUSTS BOLLYWOOD BUSINESS

VISIT…

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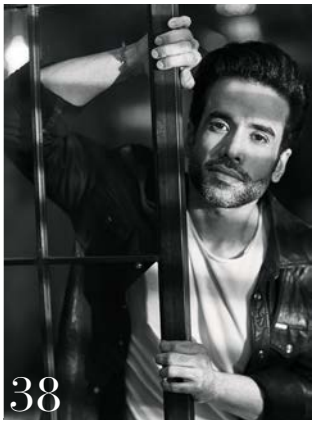

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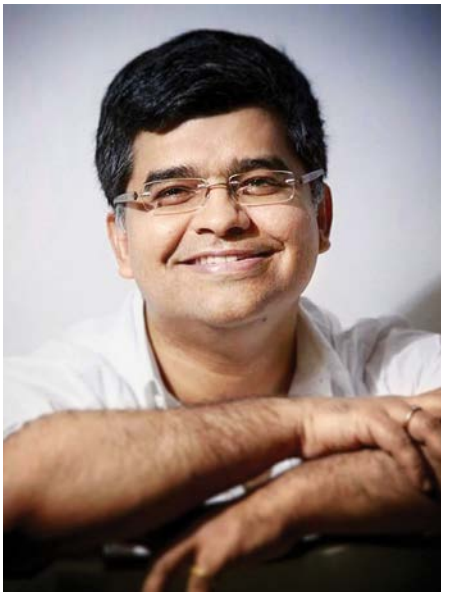

Our social media timelines have been flooded with reports and images of film stars lending a helping hand to those in need during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Kudos to all of them for all their good deeds. It's only now that the charitable activities of our film stars have come into the limelight so regularly. It's not as if they haven't been doing their bit for society. Most believe in silent charity and hence have been quiet about their work.

Akshay Kumar, for instance, has in the past provided financial aid of 90 lakh to the 180 families of the drought-hit farmers in Maharashtra who committed suicide, contributed 1 crore to Chennai's flood relief in 2015, and has started a marital arts school which teaches self-defence to women for free. It has helped 4000 women so far. He also launched an app, Bharat Ke Veer for India's Bravehearts, which enables donors to contribute directly to the families of Central Armed Police Force/ Central Para Military Forces. Nana Patekar too has been working with Marathi actor Makrand Anaspure and donating money to the widows of farmers who have committed suicide in Maharashtra. It's said he has donated 80 per cent of his life's savings to various causes.

John Abraham has been closely associated with PETA. He also has started his own charity called John's Brigade, which provides food and shelter to homeless people. Priyanka Chopra Jonas has been a Goodwill ambassador of UNICEF for many years and has been visiting war-torn areas to learn firsthand about conditions there and lend succour to the needy. She runs her own foundation called The Priyanka Chopra Foundation for Education and Health which provides education and healthcare to underprivileged children. She reportedly donates 10 per cent of her annual income to this foundation. Her bouts with depression inspired Deepika Padukone to come up with the 'The Live Love Laugh Foundation' to raise awareness about psychological disorders. She also became the brand ambassador of the NGO Indian Psychiatry Society, and launched the campaign #DoobaraPoocho.

When Shah Rukh Khan's team Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) won the Indian Premier League (IPL) season 7 in 2014, he donated the entire money (Rs. 15 crores) to cancer patients in Mumbai and Kolkata. In 2012, he adopted 12 villages in Bhitarkanika National Park in Odisha to provide them with electricity under the initiative Light A Billion Lives. Amitabh Bachchan has been involved in charity since the '80s. He has adopted flood and drought affected villages in the past, paid-off farm loans of hundreds of famers, has helped families of martyred soldiers, and has been the face of the Pulse Polio campaign, which successfully eradicated the disease in India. These are but some random examples. We're often blindsided by images of the luxurious lifestyle of the film folks. The fancy cars, the exotic vacations, the designer labels are all the trappings of being a star that they can't escape. But beneath the layers, lie hearts which care for their fellow human beings. Their hands don't hesitate when it comes to loosening the purse-strings for causes. We should take a pause to remember that before ranting about stars not doing 'enough'...

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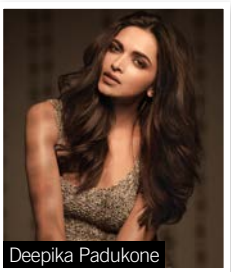
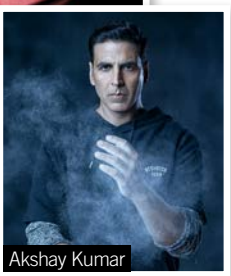


Deepika Padukone

Amitabh Bachchan



Akshay Kumar

Priyanka Chopra Jonas

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a bird's-eye view of show town's happenings

masala fix

SAVIOUR OF THE MASSES

Sonu Sood was the messiah for thousands of migrant workers making their way to their homes in far-off places last year. He arranged transport and food for them and earned their gratitude. This year too, he's helping people get oxygen and medicines. Thousands reach out to him on his social media. Now it seems he's meeting people at his residence as well.

Aamir Khan's business model revealed *pg 06*

Ajay Devgn's *Maidaan's* set destroyed by cyclone Tauktae *pg 07*

PHOTOGRAPH: YOGEN SHAH

AAMIR KHAN'S UNIQUE BUSINESS MODEL

Everyone knows that **Aamir Khan** is known as Mr Perfectionist. But what many don't know is that Khan has a business model, when it comes to his remuneration. And it seems to have worked wonders for him. Elaborating on the business model, the actor says, "I've stopped taking money upfront. I don't charge a single rupee for my films. If a film does well, first the investment is recovered. When everyone is paid and the cost is recovered, I earn a percentage in profits. So if a film doesn't work, I won't make money. But no one should suffer a loss, I feel responsible for that." He further adds, "The model that I work on is, let's say a film costs INR 100 crore to make. So all the cost involved -- cast, crew, production -- I don't take any money. When the film releases, at that point I get zero money. As it starts to earn money, it goes towards the P&A (prints and advertising), which is over and above the 100 crore. Then, the investment is paid back. Now, the producer has recovered his cost. And then, I go into percentage of profits. There is no way the producer loses any money. So if the film sustains a loss, I don't get paid. The first rupee I earn is when the costs have been recovered," he added. It's a healthy practice and we wish more stars would adopt the model.

Ranveer Singh shoots with Russian artistes for *Cirkus*

Ranveer Singh and **Rohit Shetty** team up again, after the success of *Simmba,* for *Cirkus.* The film is based on Shakespeare's *Comedy Of Errors* where Ranveer Singh and **Varun Sharma** both play a double role. The film started shooting in November last year and now is nearing completion. We hear that Ranveer Singh has been shooting for the film with some female Russian artistes. With Rohit Shetty helming the film, it is obvious that the movie will be colourful. The makers have been careful about the lead actors' looks and none of the pictures have leaked from the set. *Cirkus'* leading ladies are **Jacqueline Fernandez** and **Pooja Hegde.** The film is apparently set in the '80s. Well, Rohit Shetty films have always been fun-filled comic capers and we can't wait for this one too.

NEENA GUPTA JOINS AMITABH BACHCHAN IN *GOODBYE*

AMITABH BACHCHAN'S NEXT VENTURE, *GOODBYE,* WENT ON FLOORS RECENTLY. **NEENA GUPTA** RECENTLY JOINED THE CAST AND WILL PLAY BACHCHAN'S WIFE IN THE FILM. NEENA GUPTA AND AMITABH BACHCHAN WILL SHARE THE SCREEN TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME. NEENA SAYS, "WHEN **VIKAS** (**BAHL,** DIRECTOR) NARRATED THE FILM TO ME, I WAS SO HAPPY. IT IS A WONDERFUL SCRIPT AND ONE DOESN'T THINK ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE WHEN THE SCRIPT IS THIS EXCITING. EVEN THE ROLE IS BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN AND I AM VERY EXCITED TO BE SHARING THE SCREEN SPACE WITH MR. BACHCHAN. IT IS A DREAM COME TRUE FOR ME AND I AM QUITE ECSTATIC ABOUT IT." THE FILM IS PRODUCED BY BALAJI TELEFILMS AND RELIANCE ENTERTAINMENT.

PARINEETI CHOPRA SAYS HER CHOICES ARE HELPING THE CAUSE OF WOMEN IN CINEMA

Parineeti Chopra says she has always tried to change the narrative of how women should be portrayed on screen right from her debut. Parineeti with her superlative performances in *Ladies Vs Ricky Bahl, Ishaqzaade, Shuddh Desi Romance* and *Hasee Toh Phasee,* among others, has established herself as an effective and an unconventional counterpoint to the Bollywood norm that heroines should play a certain type of roles and look a certain way. "I strongly feel that actresses have to change the narrative of how women are portrayed on screen. Right from my debut, I have tried to do this. I have always taken it on myself to do something out of the ordinary, not portray the quintessential heroine that Bollywood has tried to depict for ages." She adds, "My last three films - *TGOTT, SAPF* and *Saina* were also an attempt by me to give varied, bold, confident, ambitious heroines to audiences. My next film choices will resonate this thought process too because I definitely want to do my bit to portray women better." That's smart thinking, alright.

Ajay Devgn's *Maidaan* set destroyed by Tauktae

Cyclone Tauktae has led to the deaths of many people and has also wreaked havoc in its wake, cleaving through many properties. According to media reports, it appears that the cyclone has not spared **Ajay Devgn's** *Maidaan* set either, which was located on the outskirts of Mumbai. While there were no casualties reported, the set on which a large part of the film was supposed to be shot, stands destroyed. "There were about 40 people on the set when the cyclone hit the *Maidaan* set - the guards and the curators of the football ground which largely comprises the set tried their best to save as much as they could but their efforts proved almost totally futile," said a source. This is the second time the makers of *Maidaan* have suffered a setback because of the set. In 2020, a 16-acre, high-maintenance set built for the film was dismantled due to the COVID-19 lockdown and the rains. "The *Maidaan* makers **Boney Kapoor** (producer) and **Amit Sharma** (director) had hoped that the ongoing lockdown would be eased beyond May 31, 2021, and they would wind up the matches in the next 15-17 days. But all those plans, for now, stand washed out," the source added. Boney Kapoor reportedly will have to shell out an extra seven crores to remake the set, once the lockdown gets lifted and shooting permissions are given.

SALMAN KHAN TAKES PIRATES TO COURT

Salman Khan has always been vocal against piracy. More so now with the theatres shut and online streaming becoming the major source of revenue. His latest release, *Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai* released on Eid and the actor had issued several warnings about taking strict action against anyone who indulges in piracy of the film. Despite the repeated warnings, a pirated version of the film started doing the rounds and the filmmakers had to involve a legal team to get to the bottom of it. A complaint was filed with the Mumbai Cyber Cell and it was later found that a Facebook user had been selling the pirated file through WhatsApp for INR 50. According to reports, a member of Salman Khan Films pretended to be a buyer and caught a man selling the film via the chatting app. This led to an FIR being filed against him and two other men for their involvement in piracy.

EMRAAN HASHMI TO PLAY THE VILLAIN IN *TIGER 3*

There was a time when **Emraan Hashmi** used to churn out blockbusters on a regular basis and was the uncrowned king of kisses. But it wasn't just the bold scenes that made him famous. He displayed his acting chops in films like *Shanghai, Azhar* and *The Dirty Picture*. Off late, the actor has been doing less films. These days he concentrates on meaty roles and looks like he's got a big role up his sleeve. We hear that Emraan Hashmi will play the lead antagonist in *Tiger 3*. Now that's surely big for him. **Salman Khan** and Emraan Hashmi locking horns will be one exciting watch. The makers initially wanted a fresh face for the role just like they had got **Sajjad Delfarooz** in *Tiger Zinda Hai*, then they thought that Emraan Hashmi would be the perfect choice. This will be Emraan Hashmi's first ever YRF film and also his first collaboration with Salman Khan and **Katrina Kaif.**

CHIRANJEEVI SETS UP FREE VACCINE CAMPS FOR CINEMA WORKERS AND JOURNALISTS

CHIRANJEEVI HAS COME OUT TO HELP THE TELUGU FILM INDUSTRY THROUGH THIS TRYING TIME AS INDIA BATTLES WITH THE SECOND WAVE OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS. CHIRANJEEVI'S CORONA CRISIS CHARITY (CCC) HAS JOINED HANDS WITH APOLLO 247 TO PROVIDE FREE COVID-19 VACCINES TO CINEMA WORKERS AND JOURNALISTS IN HYDERABAD. THE ACTOR HAS ASKED PEOPLE TO ENROLL IN THEIR ASSOCIATION SO THEY CAN GET VACCINATED FOR FREE. CHIRANJEEVI POSTED A VIDEO ON TWITTER, ANNOUNCING THE FREE VACCINE DRIVE. THOSE CINEMA WORKERS AND JOURNALISTS ABOVE THE AGE OF 45 CAN GET VACCINATED AND BRING THEIR SPOUSES ALONG, IF THEY'RE ELIGIBLE. THIS VACCINE DRIVE WILL GO ON FOR A MONTH. KUDOS TO CHIRANJEEVI'S SELFLESS ACT.

MADHURI DIXIT TO COLLABORATE WITH SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI AGAIN

One of **Madhuri Dixit's** career best performances was as Chandramukhi in **Sanjay Leela Bhansali's** *Devdas* (2002). Both Madhuri and SLB have had a mutual admiration society. Now, reports suggest that Madhuri might collaborate with SLB yet again for his upcoming web series, *Heera Mandi.* A source revealed thus, "Sanjay Leela Bhansali has almost locked the cast of his magnum opus series *Heera Mandi* that he's planning for Netflix. It's being mounted on a grand scale, on a lavish budget and *Sonakshi Sinha* and *Huma Qureshi* have already been locked to play important characters in the show. But apart from them, SLB wanted to get Madhuri for a beautiful *mujra* that he's planning. That will be one of the biggest highlights in the film." The report further added that Madhuri has shown interest in doing the part, "Madhuri has also shown her interest in the song. Bhansali feels nobody else can bring the grace and dignity to the dance form that Madhuri can. They are in advanced talks. It will be an eight to ten-day elaborate schedule and Madhuri has been offered a handsome sum to give a nod." Looks interesting.

RASHMIKA MANDANNA WON'T ACT IN THE *KIRIK PARTY* REMAKE

South sensation **Rashmika Mandanna** made her debut in 2016 with Kannada film *Kirik Party* and in a short span of around five years, she has established herself as one of the most bankable faces in South cinema. In fact, the actress is now also starring opposite Allu Arjun in his pan-Indian film, *Pushpa* and she will also be seen opposite actor Sidharth Malhotra in a Bollywood movie. That's not all - Mandanna will also be seen opposite veteran star **Amitabh Bachchan i**n *Goodbye.* Sometime back, there were talks that *Kirik Party* might get a Bollywood remake starring **Kartik Aaryan** and **Jacqueline Fernandes.** When asked if Rashmika would like to revisit her character from the 2016 film, she said, "Actually, no, I would not do the remake of *Kirik Party.* I believe that once I have done the character and felt its emotions, I won't have anything new to offer to it while revisiting it. Why should I experience the same set of emotions when I can become a part of a new story and experience newer things? Once I have played a character, I move on. I have lived my characters once and thoroughly in the first flush. I don't want to revisit any of them in a remake." True indeed.

BHUMI PEDNEKAR'S A COVID WARRIOR

Bhumi Pednekar's digital initiative COVID WARRIOR has become a powerful tool to connect patients and their families with relevant and helpful resources across the country. Says she, "The internet can be used for greater good and social media is a powerful tool if used as a unifier of people. That's what we have used for COVID WARRIOR and in turn hoped that it can save lives of those in critical need. I'm grateful for the people of the country for coming forward and helping each other. It has been a truly overwhelming journey for me, one that has bolstered my belief in people and humanity." Covid Warrior is an initiative of the people, for the people and by the people of India who have been working relentlessly to save as many lives as possible.The social media initiative that started with a team of 5 volunteers is now 200 + volunteer strong across India, who work 24x7 to save as many lives as possible by intercepting SOS messages on social media. Bhumi has also been working non-stop to find ICU/ICU Ventilator/Oxygen/Oxygen Beds/Critical Medicines across the country. She started this after her mother tested positive for the coronavirus and was quite critical. She made it her mission to save lives thereafter.

DISCO DANCER TO BE ADAPTED AS A PLAY

DISCO DANCER (1982), FEATURING **MITHUN CHAKRABORTY, OM PURI** AND **RAJESH KHANNA** IS ALL SET TO BE MADE INTO A PLAY. POPULAR MUSIC DIRECTOR DUO, **SALIM-SULAIMAN**, ARE SET TO PRODUCE THE MUSICAL. "I HAVE GIVEN THE SCREENPLAY RIGHTS OF THE FILM TO SALIM-SULAIMAN AND THEY ARE COLLABORATING WITH SA RE GA MA ON IT," DIRECTOR **BABBAR SUBHASH** REVEALED. SALIM MERCHANT SAID THEY WOULD RESTART WORK AFTER THE LOCKDOWN. SUBHASH IS TIGHT-LIPPED ABOUT WHO'D BE REPRISING THE LEAD ROLE IN THE PLAY. "FILMS AND PLAYS ARE TWO DIFFERENT MEDIUMS AND I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHO WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY THAT CHARACTER," HE SAYS. FINGERS CROSSED...

preview

movies on the block, set-talk, talent-buzz, hotties to watch out for

HELLO, HANDSOME

JOSHUA CHHABRA

X FACTOR: DRIVEN BY PASSION

Joshua Chhabra was born and brought up in Mumbai and aspired to make it big right from the beginning. He was a chubby kid back at school but an early epiphany and his father's motivation got him interested in sports. A brilliant cricket player, he dreamt of being the next Sachin Tendulkar but life had other plans and drove him to the world of glamour. From being a chubby duckling, Joshua became a runway swan. Starting out at 17 with college shows, he went on to win titles like Bombay Times Fresh Face at 17 and Gladrags Mr. India at 20. He even represented India in the Philippines for the Man Of The World pageant and won a Gold medal. While he's made a mark on the ramp, his ultimate goal is to make it to the movies. He looks upto Hrithik Roshan and believes Hrithik is the perfect combination of looks and talent. He aspires to be like Hrithik someday.

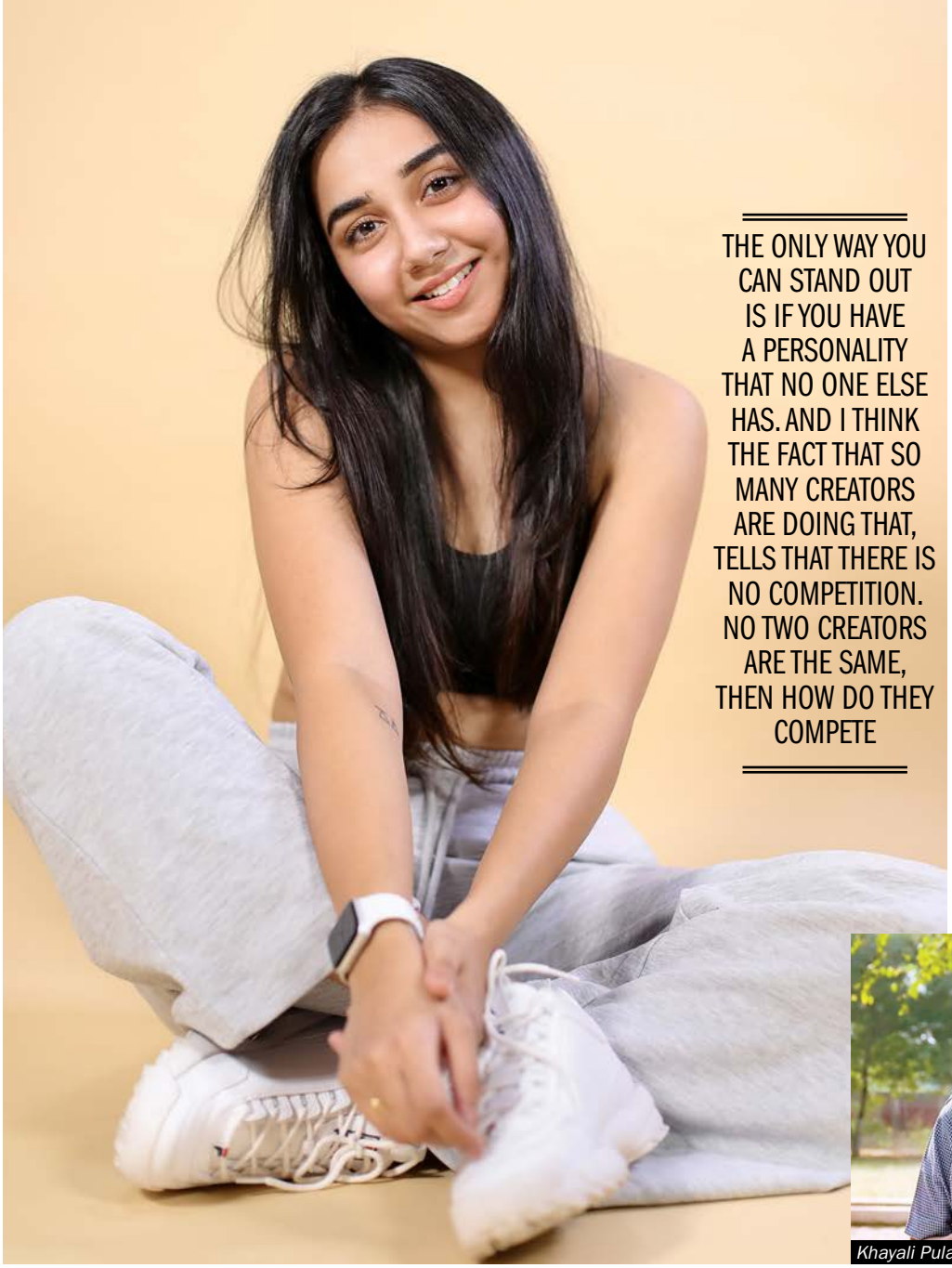
Actors Prajakta Koli and Nikita Dutta reveal their hopes and desires *pg 10*

MOSTLY SANE!

VEDANSHI PATHAK INTERVIEWS **PRAJAKTA KOLI,** WHO HAS MADE A NAME FOR HERSELF THROUGH HER QUIRKY INTERNET VIDEOS AND WILL SOON MAKE HER BIG TICKET DEBUT WITH *JUG JUGG JEEYO*

The princess of digital content creation, Prajakta Koli, started out with a dream of becoming a radio jockey. A brush with Sudeep Lahiri (Vice President, Content and Strategy at One Digital Entertainment) pushed her into making content for YouTube and the rest is history. "I remember Sudeep Lahiri telling me – 'Hey you have got great energy, have you thought about making YouTube content'. And at that point in life, I was honestly in a space where anything would have been better than waking up every day and going to the radio station. So, I took a blind leap and surprisingly found my vocation," she recalls. Her claim to fame came on World Mental Health Day in 2016, when the internet audience flooded

Jug Jugg Jeeyo



THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN STAND OUT IS IF YOU HAVE A PERSONALITY THAT NO ONE ELSE HAS. AND I THINK THE FACT THAT SO MANY CREATORS ARE DOING THAT, TELLS THAT THERE IS NO COMPETITION. NO TWO CREATORS ARE THE SAME, THEN HOW DO THEY COMPETE

Khayali Pulao

her with accolades, thanks to her #IPledgeToBeMe video. "It was a campaign where I championed self-love. It spoke against body shaming, spoke for body positivity and the response was so much more than what I had expected," she reveals. Every millennial who owns a smartphone dreams of becoming the next internet sensation and a few have definitely made it big. Prajakta is unfazed by the competition and takes it in her stride. "The only way you can stand out is if you have a personality that no one else has. And I think the fact that so many creators are doing that, tells that there is no competition. No two creators are the same, then how do they compete," she reasons.

While she still finds it fun enacting characters that she writes herself, she has expanded her horizons and has made the transition to playing characters written by others. The young gun was seen in the Netflix series *Mismatched* recently alongside Rohit Saraf. Soon she will be seen in a Dharma Productions' film *Jug Jugg Jeeyo.* Enacting a character written by someone else was something of a culture shock to her at first but she slowly adjusted. "During the initial phase of playing Dimple in *Mismatched* or playing Asha in my short film *Khayali Pulao,* I used to think that I am going to have a much tougher time understanding these characters because I haven't written them. I don't know their pulse. But then the writers and the directors I worked with helped me understand the nuances and slowly it became easier," she smiles, adding that she got the leeway to interpret the roles her own way in all her outside projects

Jug Jugg Jeeyo, a Dharma film, fell into her lap thanks to casting director Panchami Gharvi who had earlier selected her for *Mismatched*. She was called for a test and her joy knew no

> THERE ARE A LOT OF CONTENT CREATORS THAT ME AND VARUN (DHAWAN) MUTUALLY LIKE. I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO HANGING OUT WITH HIM ON THE SET. HE IS EXTREMELY WARM AND SWEET AND THAT SORT OF HELPED ME CALM MY NERVES HILE SHOOTING

Mismatched

bounds when Karan Johar greenlighted her for the project. After that, director Raj Mehta called up to congratulate her and formally offered her the role. Rubbing shoulders with Varun Dhawan, Neetu Kapoor, Anil Kapoor and Kiara Advani on the sets must have been a huge high. Conversely, being an outsider, she must have felt left out on the sets but Prajakta says it wasn't so at all. She gushes she found her co-stars and her unit to be her second family. She knew Varun from before as she had interacted with him online and found him supportive on the sets. She was surprised how knowledgeable he was about the world of content creators. "He watches a lot of them. In fact, there are a lot of creators we mutually like. I was looking forward to hanging out with him on the set. He is extremely warm and sweet and that sort of helped me calm my nerves while shooting," she informs me.

Prajakta says Kiara too was extremely supportive and welcoming and so were Anil Kapoor and Neetu Kapoor. She admired the fact that when the camera came on, they were just another set of artistes. "All they cared about was their performance and how well they could perform their role, and that passion was very inspiring," she asserts. There was COVID-19 scare on the sets of *Jug Jugg Jeeyo,* as Neetu Kapoor, Varun Dhawan and even director Raj Mehta reportedly caught the virus. Prajakta says it was a chaotic time for a while but later things quietened down. She didn't get infected herself but this close brush with the pandemic made her realise the importance of self-care and that it should be made a priority. "I had been taking that for granted for the longest time and I realised how much it affects you. Taking care of your body, taking care of your mind is extremely important. And ever since I have started doing that I have become so much more productive than before," she reflects.

Prajakta is happy with the way her life has changed in these last six years. Says she, "I would love to act more, keep creating content online, write more, meet more people, and try new things… but there are no concrete plans as such. One must remember that the pandemic is very much on."

True that. ■

Playing for keeps

AFTER TRYING HIS HAND AT PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL IN BRITAIN, **RONNIE C** IS ALL SET TO MAKE HIS BOLLYWOOD DEBUT SOON

"THE ACTORS I WANT TO WORK WITH ARE PRIYANKA CHOPRA AND TARA SUTARIA AND THE DIRECTOR I WISH TO WORK WITH IS SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI"

Born in Goa but "made in London" is how Ronnie C likes to describe himself. The upcoming celebrity already has a host of laurels to his name, having been scouted by football club Southend United at the age of 16 and going on to become the first Indian-born footballer to be signed by Southend United ever. He followed this up by becoming the first Indian-origin footballer to be signed by Burton Albion FC and Brentford FC who play in the Championship tier of football. Brentford qualified for the English Premier League last week and Ronnie's joy knows no bound. Ronnie C also loves boxing, mixed martial arts, pop music and hip hop dance styles. His YouTube channel, Super RC is close to hitting 50,000 subscribers. Ronnie doesn't believe in having one passion or source of income and hence, he also owns a merchandise line and his clothing line is set to debut soon. However, his heart lies in cinema and he will soon be playing the main lead in a film which is being helmed by a well-known director in Bollywood. For preparation, the budding actor will be going to Los Angeles for a few months to train under Michelle Danner who has worked with A-list celebrities like Henry Cavill, Penelope Cruz and Salma Hayek. He has recieved a few interesting offers from Hollywood as well. In an interview with *Filmfare*, Ronnie C opens up about his love for the movies and more. Excerpts...

Which is your favourite movie of all time and why?

The Dark Knight. Heath Ledger's take on the Joker was next level. He went from being a regular rom-com actor to creating one of the best performances on screen. The entire movie was gripping and the acting was amazing. I liked Christian Bale's performance as Batman as well.

Which Bollywood actor's career graph do you appreciate?

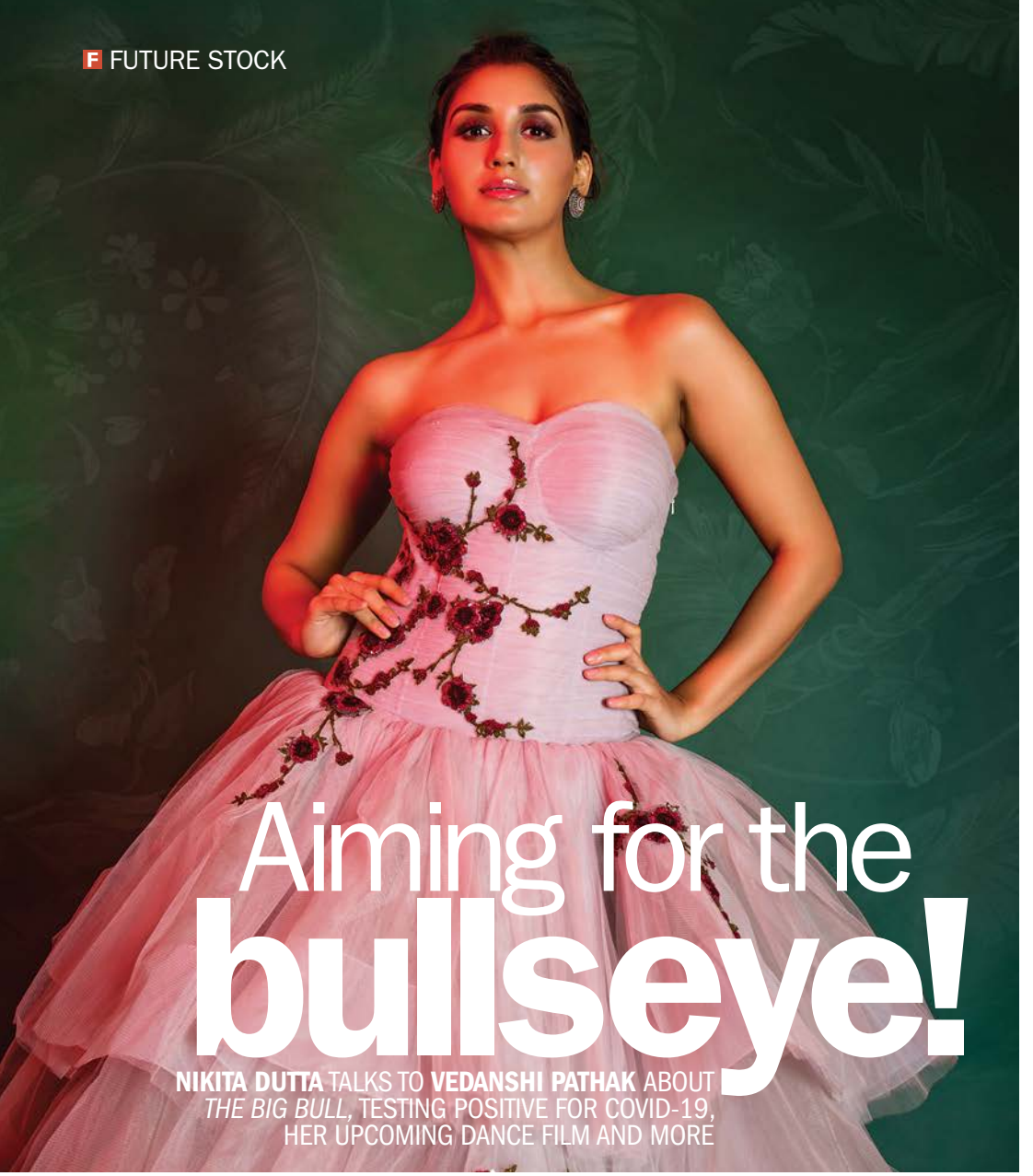
Priyanka Chopra. She's a worldwide name who's big not only in India but also in Hollywood. She has achieved huge things worldwide and has led an exemplary life off-screen as well. Her global appeal is what makes her stand apart and that's the graph I appreciate and admire and am inspired by the most.

When did you decide to become an actor?

During my football career, I had a natural knack of being an entertainer on the football pitch. I was nicknamed Ronaldo. I know I can entertain and achieve big things as an actor. As I have the drive, looks, charisma and the 'it' factor.

Which director in Bollywood do you dream to work with?

The director I wish to work with is Sanjay Leela Bhansali and the actors I want to work with are Priyanka Chopra and Tara Sutaria.

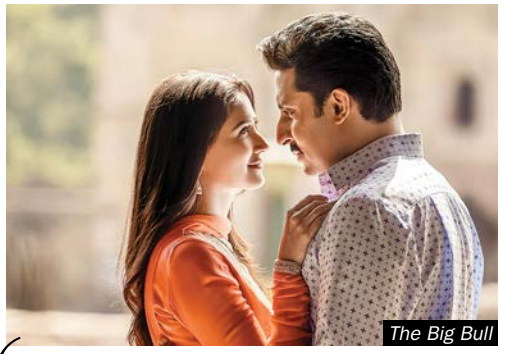


Aiming for the bullseye!

NIKITA DUTTA TALKS TO **VEDANSHI PATHAK** ABOUT *THE BIG BULL*, TESTING POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, HER UPCOMING DANCE FILM AND MORE

Nikita Dutta's father is an officer in the Indian Navy. As a child, her life revolved around shuttling from one naval base to the other, making friends all over again with random strangers and then saying goodbye to them when another transfer took place. She came to Mumbai to study at St. Xavier's College, and graduated in Economics. She took part in the Miss India pageant along the way and was one of the finalists in 2012. Being part of Miss India got her noticed and she soon picked up roles in popular television shows like *Ek Duje Ke Vaaste, Haasil, Dream Girl* and more before venturing into Bollywood. Her debut film was *Lekar Hum Deewana Dil* (2014) but she got noticed for her role in Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Kabir Singh* (2019). The film went on to become a blockbuster and changed many lives. One of them was Nikita's. Says she, "People finally started recognising my work post *Kabir Singh*. I got offered many good projects after its release. In terms of films, it did end up being a turning point for me." Talking about her *Kabir Singh* co-star Shahid Kapoor, she says she admires him for the way he got into the character. She observed Shahid on the sets and tried to learn from him. "We didn't interact much but I found him to be an easygoing co-star. Overall, it was fab working with him as I learnt so much from the experience."

Nikita goes on to reveal how *Kabir Singh* came her way. Sandeep Vanga had watched her cameo in *Lust Stories* (2018) and asked her to come for a meeting after watching *Arjun Reddy*. She was intrigued by the call but said yes. She was blown away by *Arjun Reddy* and was open to doing any role in the remake. She was offered the role of actress Jia Sharma, with whom Kabir has a brief fling in the film. "I was expecting an



The Big Bull

"Abhishek just kind of lightens everybody's mood around him. He doesn't have any airs around him, neither does he throw any tantrums. He is humble as a human being. He's very humorous, always pulling people's legs. He's calm and doesn't lose patience"

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Kabir Singh

Maska

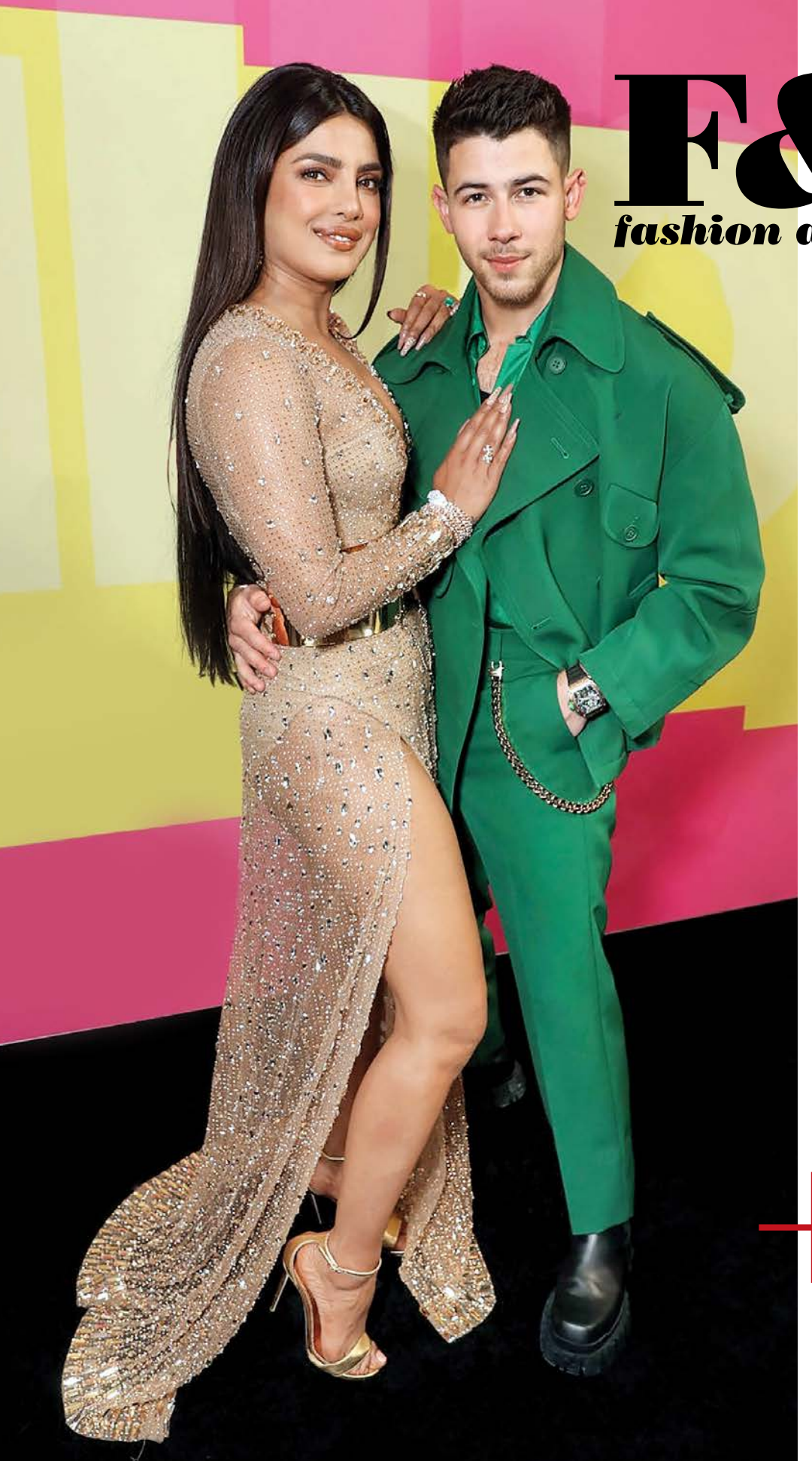
> People finally started recognising my work post *Kabir Singh*. I got offered many good projects after its release. In terms of films, it did end up being a turning point for me

audition but Sandeep sir just talked to me for ten minutes, asking me questions about *Arjun Reddy*. He must have liked my responses as he soon offered me this important role."

Post *Kabir Singh*, Nikita did a Netflix film called *Maska* (2020) alongwith Prit Kamani, Shirley Setia and Manisha Koirala, which was received well by the audience. That paved the way for *The Big Bull*, which was based on the life of the notorious securities trader Harshad Mehta. Abhishek Bachchan played Mehta and Nikita played his wife. Nikita met Abhishek the first time while the look trials were happening. And they were shooting a romantic song the next time they met. "We were shooting for our song *Ishq namaza* in Delhi and I was stressed out. But it went smoothly because Abhishek just kind of lightens everybody's mood around him. He doesn't have any airs around him, neither does he throw any tantrums. He is humble as a human being. He's very humorous, always pulling people's legs. He's calm and doesn't lose patience. It could be the most stressful scene but he refuses to bring it on his face and that's a very admirable quality," reveals Nikita. The actress says one of the reasons she said yes to *The Big Bull* was because of the film's period feel. That's the reason she'd said yes to *Gold* (2018) too, the period sports drama where she played Vicky Kaushal's love interest. There she played someone who was closer to her grandmother's generation and here she was playing someone who was close to her mother's generation. She took pointers from her mother about the era to prepare for her role. *The Big Bull* got compared to Hansal Mehta's hit series on the same subject, *Scam 1992*. Talking about it, Nikita says it's unlucky that the two things came around the same time. "It is unfortunate that there are comparisons but I think there is a lot of difference because that is a web show and this is a film. I hope the audience understands this and gives the love they think it deserves. Of course, *Scam 1992* is brilliant and I loved it too," she adds.

Her next projects include the remake of Malayalam horror flick *Ezra* (2017), where she'll be seen with Emraan Hashmi. Another is a dance film *Rocket Gang* directed by Bosco Martis. She says she's been learning dance since 2019 to prepare for her role in *Rocket Gang*. "We were supposed to start shooting it last year in March but then the lockdown happened. We started again in December 2020 and it is scheduled to wrap as soon as the government lifts up a few restrictions."

Nikita tested COVID-19 positive but made a rapid recovery. She shudders at the memory. "I just hope 2021 doesn't bring disappointments because we have had enough of that last year. The whole world has had enough of that. So, just praying that there's more positivity this year."Trying to keep that in my head. Just more good news and less bad news." Our prayers are towards that as well...



F&B
fashion and beauty

GOLD & GREEN MAGIC

PRIYANKA CHOPRA AND NICK JONAS

WHERE: BILLBOARD MUSIC AWARDS 2021

THE X FACTOR: POWER OF TWO

Priyanka Chopra is one to make bold choices for the red carpet and she did not disappoint in her custom-made Dolce and Gabbana gold number. The 'naked' dress featured a plunging neckline, a thigh-high slit and a thick metallic belt that screamed Cher as the diva stepped onto the red carpet. Complementing her in a forest green ensemble by Fendi was Nick Jonas. His silk shirt was the perfect contrast to the texture of the ensemble. And that bling around his waist topped off the look to perfection. Priyanka and Nick both aced their looks individually and were a visual delight together on the starry night.

Small is big *pg 18*
Masked delight *pg 20*
Monotone magic *pg21*

COMPILED BY: ANALITA SETH
PHOTOGRAPHS: YOGEN SHAH

THE TRENCH CONNECTION

Overcoats are magical pieces that transform outfits

ISABELLE KAIF

PARINEETI CHOPRA

SONAM KAPOOR AHUJA

The pandemic has made us fall in love with the casual wear in our wardrobes. Work from home means we can stay in comfy sweat suits and pyjamas even when duty calls. So much that we've learnt to transform these into impeccable party wear. One piece of clothing that's doing the trick for us ladies is the classic trench coat. You can just let it hang off your shoulders or belt it over athleisure and you've got yourself an ensemble ready for the outside world. We've spotted this trend more than ever before in B-town. Making casual sportswear look super chic, our divas have been resorting to overcoats and trenches to make a style statement.

MIRA KAPOOR

SHRADDHA KAPOOR

Loewe

Khrisjoy

R13

LONG LONG WAY TO GO

Forte Forte

Pleats Please Issey Miyake

Marco Rambaldi

"Everyone in the world should have a trench coat, and there should be a trench coat for everyone in the world. It does not matter your age; it doesn't matter your gender." -Angela Ahrendts

BAG TO DEFER

A fancy bag never hurt nobody

Bags aren't just about carrying your things around. Used wisely, they can make a simple outfit look like a million bucks. You can throw on a simple dress or a t-shirt with jeans and top it with a quirky handbag to elevate it a thousand fold. From unusual sizes, as small as a bag around the wrist to duffle bags that have pop-art references on it, we've seen B-town fashionistas carry 'em all. So what may seem like a low on functionality investment is high on style quotient.

"It's not what you spend but how you wear it that counts. The key is often to dress up inexpensive basics with accessories. Something like a beautiful designer bag or belt can make everything else look richer and more luxurious."- Chloe Sevigny

FLOWER POWER

Florals prints are an evergreen trend.

Floral prints have an eternal place in the world of fashion but even they have gone through a fair share of evolution over the years. We saw them make it to the couture runway in 2010. And ever since, they have taken over every piece of clothing, be it dresses, jackets or even shoes. While a mix and match of decorative flowers was the start of this trend, we've sighted cluster floral prints aggressively in the last few months. They instantly draw attention and are a favourite in the summer collections of many designer brands.

TAAPSEE PANNU

ALIA BHATT

SHAMIKA SHETTY

SHILPA SHETTY

KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN

Liu Jo

Zadig & Voltaire

Alexandre Vauthier

Giambattista Valli

"In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity."
Henry Wadsworth

LET THE SUMMER BEGIN

FATIMA SANA SHAIKH

SONAL CHAUHAN

CHAINED TO FASHION

Masks are evolving with a new additional accessory

We were just about getting used to the custom designer face masks when a functional addition was made in this mandatory accessory. An attached chain is one of the most useful and trendy introductions to the pandemic wardrobe. And if you look around, it's everywhere now. Not only does it add a little bling and colour to your outfit, but also comes in handy when you have to remove your mask (only when necessary) in public. Dangling around your neck, it's an unfortunate yet necessary albatross you have to carry, so why not add some zing to it.

KRITI SANON

TAAPSEE PANNU

JANHVI KAPOOR

TAMANNAAH BHATIA

SUNNY LEONE

"Create your own style, let it be unique for yourself and yet identifiable for others."
Anna Wintour

"Comfort is of great importance to me. I really want to encourage girls to dress in whatever they feel comfortable in and not get bogged down by fashion trends."
Deepika Padukone

DEEPIKA PADUKONE

TIPS TO STRETCH THE OOMPH:

- Statement jewellery is a good way to add a little bling to your monotone ensemble.
- A pair of contrasting heels can go a long way
- Pick a bag that may not be the same shade but complement the look.
- Keep your make-up as close to the shades of your look as possible. Contrasting make-up can take away from the look and make it gaudy.

50 SHADES OF DP

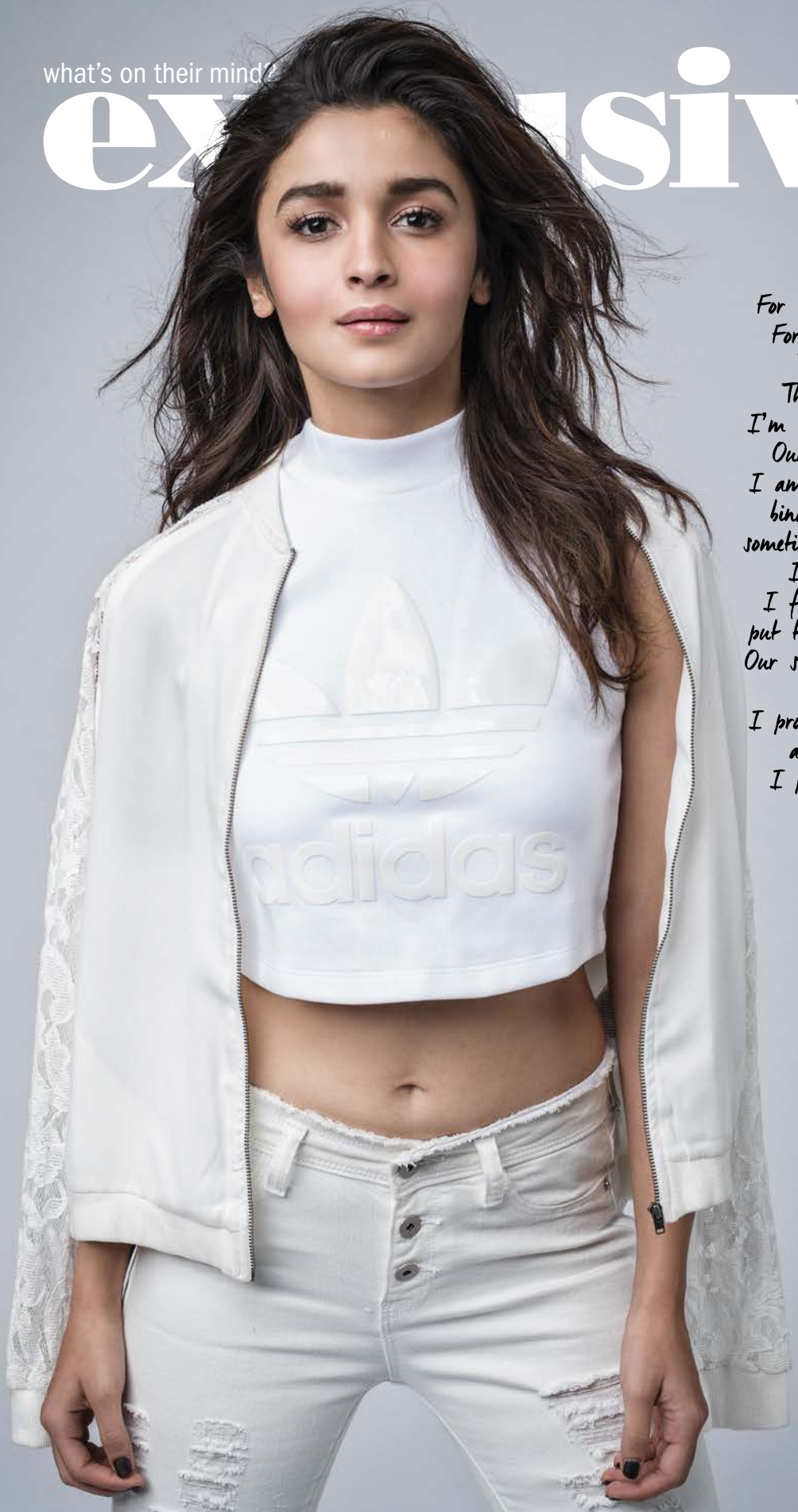
MONOCHROME MAIDEN

Deepika Padukone's love for monotone ensemble is unmatched

She's the most sought after diva in Bollywood and her stardom transcends the movies. She's a fashion icon who can go from classy to quirky with the help of a hat or a lack of one. But her eternal love for some trends is evident and we can't help but obsess over how well she pulls them off. One such trend is the tone on tone ensembles. Queen Dee's love for monotones goes back to when she started her career and it's only evolved with time. Be it trench coats or leather pants, Deepika has managed to make everything work in matching hues to perfection.

what's on their mind?

exclusives



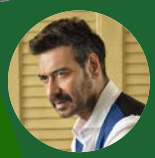
Today and everyday,
I am grateful.
For the sunrise and the sunset,
For the forest full of trees,
The animals, the birds,
The lakes, rivers and seas,
I'm grateful for all we've built,
Our bridges and our streets,
I am grateful for the love that
binds us and the wind that
sometimes knocks us off our feet,
In these uncertain times,
I feel grateful for those who
put themselves in danger for us,
Our saviours, the world's warriors,
Today and everyday,
I promise to care for our planet
and all it has to offer,
I promise to value our home
by doing better...

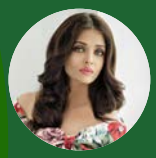
- Alia Bhatt

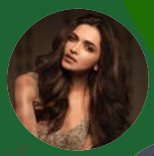
PHOTOGRPAH: ABHAY SINGH

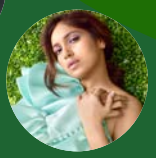
EARTH PEOPLE

DEVESH SHARMA HIGHLIGHTS THE ECO-WARRIORS OF BOLLYWOOD ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY, WHICH FALLS ON JUNE 5









Our scientists as well as our saints have been telling us since eons that the earth doesn't belong to us. We share it with a thousand other species. And if we continue to pollute it, to abuse it, we'll only be digging the graves of our future generations. In today's fast-changing world, where a social media post holds more sway than a screaming headline in a top newspaper, we need woke celebs to shake people out of their slumber and wake up to the reality of a world whose natural resources are slowly depleting. Our film stars have time and again recognised that the immense clout they have shouldn't just be used to sell movie tickets or push brands. It can be utilised for altruistic purposes as well. More and more Bollywood stars are espousing the cause of a cleaner environment of having a holistic relationship with Mother Nature. Presenting a list of some of such enlightened souls, who have taken it upon themselves to become eco-warriors...

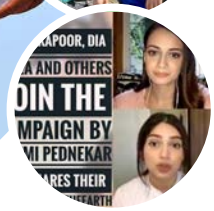
ONE WORLD FOR ALL

Alia Bhatt

Alia Bhatt has always been a nature lover. Last year, on the sets of her film *Brahmastra,* she, along with co-star Ranbir Kapoor and director Ayan Mukerji, started an initiative where plastic bottles were banned on the sets. She also lent her voice to the #BeatPlasticPollution initiative, highlighting the ill-effects of plastic. Then, some years ago, she started an initiative called CoExist, which aims at reducing the conflict between humans and animals. It's a noble pursuit which claims that the animals have as much right to the planet as us and aims to educate people about the same. She's always amplifying calls for adopting stray dogs and cats and has helped in drives towards neutering them and keeping them disease free.

CLIMATE CONTROL

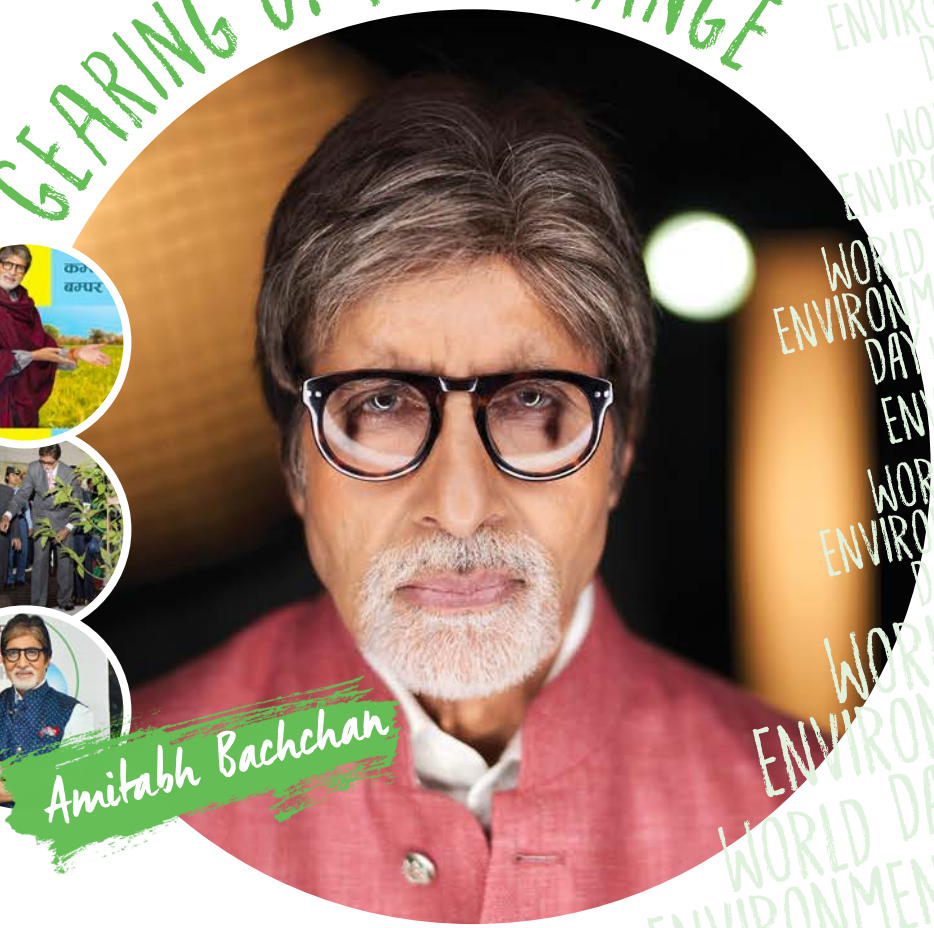
Bhumi Pednekar



During the shooting of her last three films, Bhumi Pednekar made sure that the crew adopted a zero-wastage policy on the set. All the excess food from the sets was distributed in a hygienic manner to the needy and the whole unit likewise used steel bottles, which could be refilled, for drinking water. She developed a love for nature as a child, maybe it was her name which did the trick. And she longed to do something about the environment when she became an actress. In 2019, she launched Climate Warrior, a social media initiative that brings to light work done by various individuals as well as environment groups across India. She teamed up with activist Afroz Shah for a beach clean-up project in Versova, Mumbai. She was also part of Fridays For Future march in Mumbai. She also started the #OneWishForTheEarth campaign on Instagram and encouraged colleagues from the film world to share messages about the environment-based issues. Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar, Karan Johar, Anushka Sharma and many more joined her in the initiative.

GEARING UP FOR CHANGE

Amitabh Bachchan has been espousing the cause of the environment since ages. In 2007, he launched the Global Cool campaign along with Sienna Miller, to raise awareness in India about global warming. In 2008, the icon showed his support for the United Nations' Billion Tree Campaign by planting a tree at the UN's Asia Pacific regional headquarters in Bangkok. He also partnered with Global Cool, an International Indian Film Academy initiative, to build awareness about India's vulnerability to climate change. He's also part of the movement to reduce the use of vehicles and air-conditioners while shooting films. He's also the brand ambassador of Indian Government's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' campaign, encouraging fellow citizens to be more hygienic and is also associated with Green Good Deeds Campaign, aimed at bringing about small behavioural changes in everyday life towards environmental benefit.



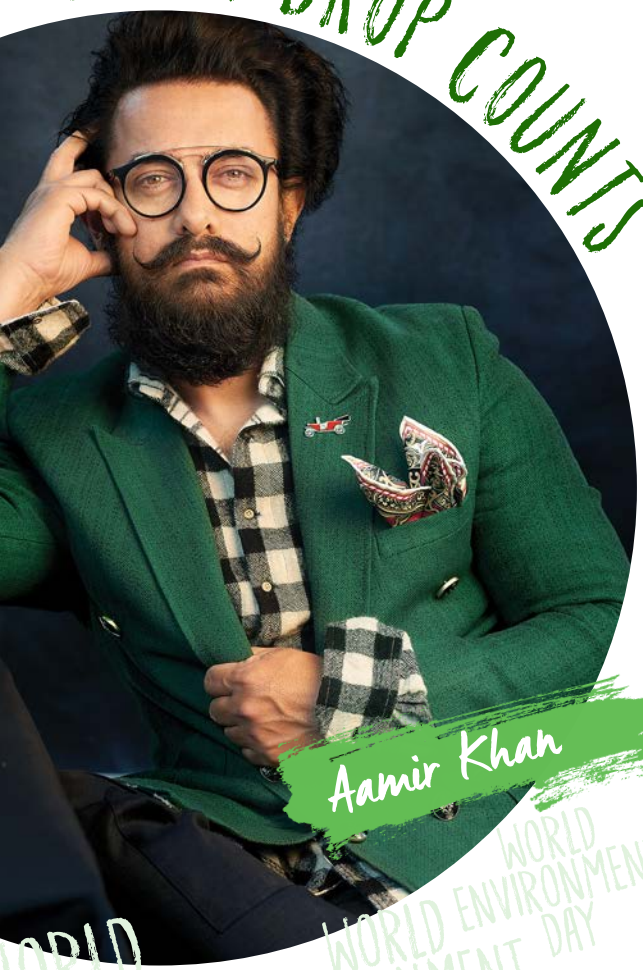
Amitabh Bachchan

CATCHING THEM YOUNG

Abhishek Bachchan

Last year, Abhshek Bachchan generously contributed towards Farah Khan's daughter Arya's initiative of providing food for stray animals affected by the coronavirus pandemic. In his own quiet ways, Abhishek has been helping various environmental causes for many years. He won the Green Globe award in 2012 for his efforts in fighting climate change. He believes that the youth can bring about a difference in tackling climate issues. He has often lent his voice to the cause of global warming and other related issues.

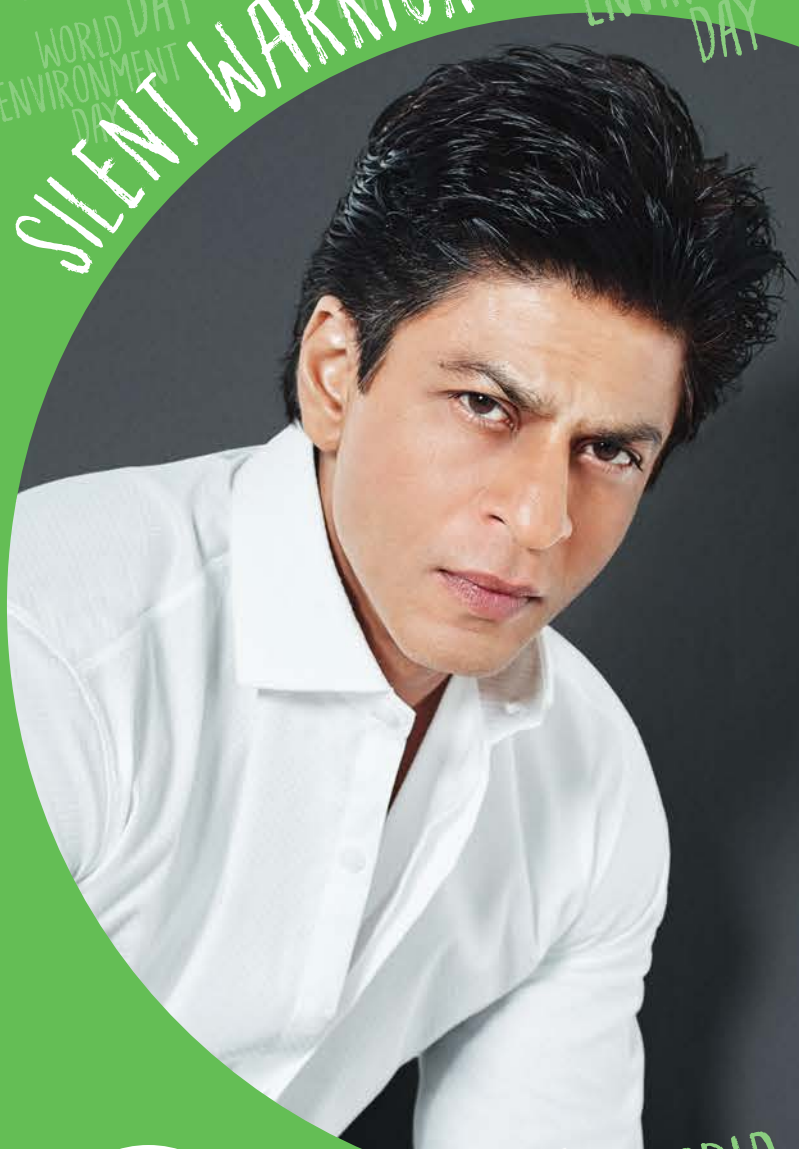
EVERY DROP COUNTS



Aamir Khan

In 2006, his views on the Narmada Bachao Andolan earned him the ire of the then Gujarat government. That didn't deter him from actively espousing the cause of water conservation. With the help of his wife Kiran Rao and friend Satyajit Bhatkal, he founded the Paani foundation in 2016 with the aim of making Maharashtra free of drought. The foundation has reached out to more than 4000 villages and helped conserve water by educating the villagers and helping them set up various initiatives. In the span of 2 years starting September 2018, inspired by the great Japanese ecologist Akira Miyawaki, Paani foundation in association with Saytrees Environmental trust, turned a barren patch of land into a forest.

SILENT WARRIOR



Shah Rukh Khan

As a philanthropist and spokesperson, SRK stands up for environmental causes like water-supply issues to rural solar power. In 2011, he was appointed by the UNOPS as the first global ambassador of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council. During his multiple appearances at the NDTV Greenathon, he has adopted up to twelve villages to provide with electricity as part of the solar energy harnessing project's initiative Light A Billion Lives. He says he doesn't talk about his humanitarian causes because of his religious beliefs.

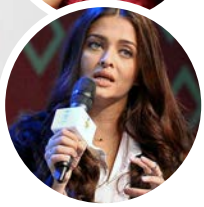
BRAND FACTORY

Akshay Kumar

Akshay Kumar was recently honoured by the Golden Globe Honors Foundation alongside Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio and others. He was given the honour for promoting sanitation and hygiene through his films *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* and *PadMan*. He was appointed the face of the initiative 'Swachhata hi Seva' by the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments. He also spearheads the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) 'Swachh Sarvekshan' initiative which educates and encourages the masses to maintain better cleanliness levels in Mumbai. Akshay is also the brand ambassador of the Government of India's road safety campaign. He also took part in a tree-planting drive last year.

INVESTING IN ECO-FRIENDLY VENTURES

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan



In 2019, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan invested in environmental intelligence startup Ambee. Along with her mother Vrinda, the actor became an angel investor in the Bangalore-based startup, which provides data about hyperlocal air quality. She had earlier invested in wind power initiatives in Maharashtra. She has also been associated with PETA for a long while and has also spoken on environmental issues through various UN initiatives.

CARING FOR NATURE

Anushka Sharma

Anushka Sharma has been using her social media posts to raise various environmental concerns. In 2019, she talked about Leonardo Di Caprio's concerns about the fire that has engulfed the Amazonian rainforests and questioned why the mainstream media had been silent on the issue. She talked about melting glaciers in another post. In 2018, she shared the news of the sad demise of the last surviving white male rhino. She also explained how the species could have survived a few more years if humans didn't indulge in poaching. Anushka also recently activated the practice of waste segregation on the sets of the projects greenlit by her production house Clean Slate Films and became the first producer to do so.

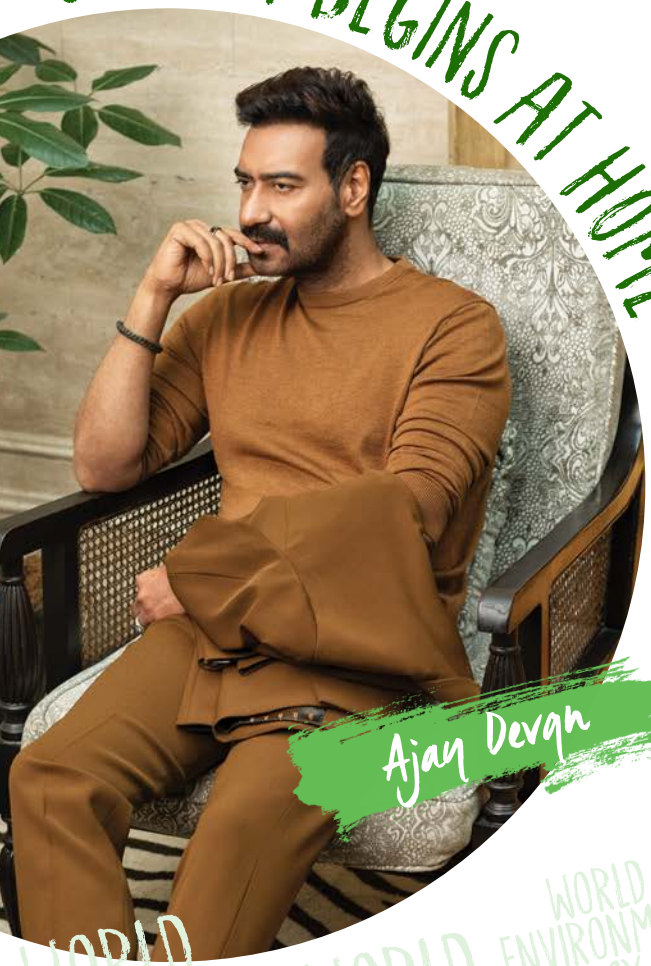
KEEPING IT CLEAN

Salman Khan

Last year, on the eve of World Environment Day, Salman Khan posted a video of him cleaning the pathways in and around his Panvel farmhouse. He was joined by rumoured girlfriend Iulia Vantur in the initiative. He has also lent his voice towards the ban of single-use plastic in the past.

In 2012. Ajay Devgn helped set up a solar energy power project in Gujarat. Through a joint venture, he ensured that the 25MW solar plant at Charanka was completed. He's also known to use solar-powered generators on his sets. He along with his wife Kajol, takes part in Mumbai's cleanliness drives to help clean up the city's beaches and streets. Recently, he was part of a tree-planting drive in Telangana, where five thousand saplings got planted at the Malkapur Industrial Park.

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME



Ajay Devgn

SMALL STEPS TO SAFETY

Deepika Padukone

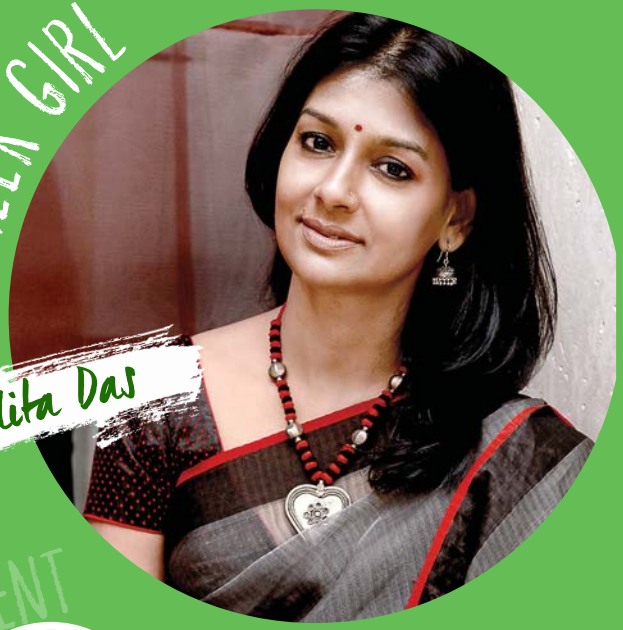
In 2010, Deepika Padukone adopted the Maharashtrian village of Ambegaon as part of NDTV's Greenathon Campaign, to provide the village with a regular supply of electricity. She has also invested in Blu Smart, an electric taxi startup. For the Bangalore reception of their wedding, Deepika and Ranveer Singh chose to go eco friendly. The event was a plastic-free zone as friends and family were served in biodegradable tableware. The couple opted for products made from sugarcane fibre rather than plastic. CHUK, an eco-friendly tableware manufacturer was responsible for supplying around 75,000 units of its products for the wedding reception.

FIGHTING FOR FORESTS

Raveena Tandon

Raveena Tandon is the brand ambassador of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai and has even adopted a Leopard. She's been a self-proclaimed nature lover and has been associated with various causes concerning nature for many years. She's an ardent environmentalist and has worked closely with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) since 2002, she supported the protection of the Aarey forest in 2019 and she even supported Mission Paani on Environment day of 2020.

PIONEER GIRL



Nandita Das

In January 2005, when the Tsunami hit parts of Asia, Nandita Das was actively supporting NGOs working for rehabilitation of affected persons in the Galle area of Sri Lanka, one of the worst affected areas. She was later actively involved with the water conservation movement in India. Her work on spreading awareness about water conservation has helped in promoting judicious practices. Also she has collaborated with the Centre for Science and Environment to produce short films about rainwater harvesting. She has been known to wax eloquent on sustainable alternatives to plastics as well.

LONG-TERM INFLUENCER

Rahul Bose

The year 2009 saw him becoming the ambassador for 'Planet Alert', an initiative to save the environment through various ways. The same year, he launched an initiative on climate change which focused on government policy at the highest level and advocated for the cause through talks with various international bodies such as the United Nations. At the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen, Rahul joined tens of thousands of demonstrators at a mass rally and candlelight vigil outside the Danish Parliament in Copenhagen. He was one of the 10 speakers to speak at the Global Day of Action for Climate Change rally in Copenhagen.

Queen's gambit

Taapsee Pannu offers up some straight drives to **Raghuvendra Singh's** yorkers

Taapsee Pannu is so down-to-earth, so real that you have to pinch yourself into believing you're talking to a film star. You feel you're conversing with a college friend. *You can ask her anything under the sun and be assured of an honest answer. There's no off-the-record conversations with her as she doesn't like to gossip. She'd rather talk about the art of cinema or the craft of acting than give pointers towards who's in whose bed currently. She doesn't talk about her own love life either, arguing that it has nothing to do with what she does as an actor. She's not known to mince words on the social media. Her forthright views are a refreshing change from the doublespeak that most actors practice. She promised us an interview after winning the Best Actor In A Leading Role trophy at the recently concluded Vimal Elaichi Filmfare Awards 2021. Excerpts from a free-flowing* tete-a-tete...

> *GENDER-EQUALITY OR EMPOWERMENT WILL HAPPEN ONLY WHEN THE ACTRESSES EMPOWER EACH OTHER, WHEN THEY STAND UP FOR EACH OTHER, WHEN THEY APPRECIATE EACH OTHER. I REALLY FEEL WE SHOULD START APPRECIATING EACH OTHER MORE*

WHEN YOU ACCEPTED THE FILMFARE AWARD FOR BEST ACTRESS THIS YEAR, YOU THANKED ALL YOUR FELLOW NOMINEES. WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO DO THAT?

Every girl nominated this year in both the popular and the critics' category was part of a special film. I mentioned in the speech how each one of them is so courageous in choosing the kind of films they have chosen. Because I know the kind of hardships a female actor faces. You can't put too much 'feminism' in a female-centric film because it's not considered 'safe' from a business point of view. Then, there are budget constraints. A female-centric film has a limited budget compared to a male-centric film. Casting too isn't easy. Because, trust me, no matter how big an actress you become in the film industry, it's tough to cast a male actor opposite you when it comes to female-centric films. I can say from experience that my directors face a lot of issues as male actors feel insecure about not being the lead or getting lesser screen time. Sometimes I wonder how insecure you are, when you're giving away a good film just because you have 10 per cent less time than the girl. Girls have been doing that for decades, where they have 1/5th of the screen space and they still happily do it. Because they feel that even that much is enough for them to show their potential. Until last year I

was doing films like *Mission Mangal, Soorma* or *Judwaa 2*. Because I wanted people to understand that I'm not against doing lesser screen space. I'm just saying give me a role through which the audience will remember me when they walk out of the theatre. And after all that's sorted, we have to make sure we don't clash with any big male star when it comes to the film's release. Because even if the film with the female lead looks more promising, the film with the male star ends up getting more number of screens and shows. Gender-equality or empowerment will happen only when the actresses empower each other, when they stand up for each other, when they appreciate each other. I really feel we should start appreciating each other more. Only then the next level of empowerment will happen.

HOW DOES IT FEEL WINNING THE BLACK LADY BACK-TO-BACK?

It's quite unreal actually because in 2016 when *Pink* happened and I was not even nominated, it did break my heart back then. After that, I almost lost hope that this will ever happen. So when it happened back-to-back, it was quite unreal for me. It feels nice to get validated by the oldest awards in the country. It gives me confidence to keep following my

> *I WONDER HOW INSECURE YOU'RE WHEN YOU'RE GIVING AWAY A GOOD FILM JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE 10 PER CENT LESS TIME THAN THE GIRL. GIRLS HAVE BEEN DOING THAT FOR DECADES, WHERE THEY HAVE 1/5TH OF THE SCREEN SPACE AND THEY STILL HAPPILY DO IT*

intuition because if it has happened back-to-back then it's just not a fluke. It probably means I am on the right path and I should continue pushing myself ahead in the same direction.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT YOUR PERFORMANCE IN *THAPPAD?* HOW WILL YOU REVIEW IT?

I always end up finding so many holes in my performance and that leaves me underwhelmed. After watching *Thappad,* I told my director Anubhav Sinha that I felt everyone was good except me. I think it's good in a way because it kind of helps me to push myself to get better with every film. I'm glad that I don't consider myself the epitome of perfection because if I do that then my scope of learning will decrease.

> *"I STARTED OFF KNOWING NOTHING — NEITHER ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, NOR ABOUT THE CRAFT. ONE THING THAT REALLY HELPED ME AT THAT POINT WAS MY INQUISITIVENESS, MY EAGERNESS TO LEARN"*

WOULD YOU SAY *THAPPAD'S* CRITICAL SUCCESS HAS CHANGED THE GAME FOR YOU?

Thappad was my first ever solo lead film, which ended up getting a lot of love from the critics as well as from the audiences. The way it started up picking momentum at the box-office in those two weeks before the lockdown was remarkable. That's what *Thappad* did. It just kind of sealed a certain position for me.

BEFORE *THAPPAD* YOU DID FILMS LIKE *MULK* AND *SAAND KI AANKH* WHICH WON PLAUDITS FROM THE CRITICS BUT WEREN'T 100 CRORES FILMS. HOW DOES AN ACTOR MOTIVATE HERSELF TO KEEP INVESTING IN GOOD CONTENT IN AN INDUSTRY WHERE YOU'RE MEASURED BY YOUR BOX OFFICE SUCCESS?

I've always believed that if you have to survive in the industry for a long time, you need to create a unique space for yourself. That will only happen, if I do the kind of movies

that I enjoy watching as an audience. And in spite of not really seeing those magic figures of 100 crores for every film of mine, I still ended up having an audience for my films. Yes, that does test your courage. But you know that you have chosen this path knowing that it's going to be longer and tougher. So you should be prepared for the hardships you're going to face.

WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT YOUR JOURNEY, WHAT WERE THE HURDLES YOU FACED AND WHAT WERE THE MILESTONES?

I started off knowing nothing about the industry or about the craft. One thing that really helped me at that point was my inquisitiveness, my eagerness to learn. Because I knew the only way ahead in life is to be open to learning whatever you can from around you. I made mistakes but I did not repeat my mistakes. If you want me to name a turning point then that probably was *Baby,* where a seven minute role took the masses by surprise. I was launched in Hindi cinema by David Dhawan, one of our biggest commercial directors, in *Chashme Buddoor.* So that's another milestone. Actually, everything I did back then has led me to do the new kinds of films I'm doing now. I think over the years, my audience has shown so much faith and confidence in me, that their expectation levels have become high and nothing average in terms of content is going to make them happy. I am totally fine with that kind of pressure because it helps me grow as an actor.

DO YOU FEAR THAT FAME AND STARDOM WILL VANISH ONE DAY?

No, not at all. This part has never scared me. I didn't enter the industry with the idea of becoming a star. I just stumbled upon this profession, then I learned my way up. And I know that the ladder that I'm climbing up, I have to climb it down one day. That the fame and glamour will go out of the window. And I will gracefully embrace and accept it too.

★ *Shabaash Mithu*
★ *Looop Lapeta*

IF THEY'RE JUST GOING TO KEEP THROWING THE SAME BASELESS RANDOM, ILLOGICAL, NEGATIVE STUFF AT YOU, IT STOPS AFFECTING YOU AFTER SOMETIME. AND I'VE REALISED THAT PEOPLE WHO ARE DOING THAT ARE JUST UNHAPPY WITH THEIR OWN LIVES

SO YOU DON'T HAVE ANY KIND OF INSECURITY AT ALL?

I can tell you the fears I have as an actor. I fear that there will come a day where my performance will not add anything new to the film. Also, I want the performances in each successive film to be better than the one earlier. I'm trying to lead as normal a life as possible. To keep an even head on my shoulders. So that I'm able to depict normal people as they are. I want my performances to be as true to real life as possible. The fear of getting disconnected from my audience worries me.

> *I FEAR THAT THERE WILL COME A DAY WHERE MY PERFORMANCE WILL NOT ADD ANYTHING NEW TO THE FILM. ALSO, I WANT THE PERFORMANCES IN EACH SUCCESSIVE FILM TO BE BETTER THAN THE ONE EARLIER*

YOU DON'T SEEM TO BE POLITICALLY CORRECT. WHAT GIVES YOU THE COURAGE TO BE SO BOLD?

I might be a politically incorrect, non-diplomatic person, but I feel I am honest. Even if I make mistakes, I accept them because I know I am a human being. To err is human, so there is no shame in making mistakes. I don't speak against people. I speak against issues. I speak against the sin and not the sinner. Blaming people is just going to create a bitter atmosphere. Basically, you should be able to live a life where you can sleep peacefully knowing that you haven't harmed anyone or done something wrong that you're embarrassed about. It's the most beautiful life to have and I have that life.

HOW DO YOU HANDLE NEGATIVITY?

The negativity affects you in the beginning when it's new. You know how they say you should keep changing your workouts so your body can react to it, otherwise it just hits a plateau. That's what happens with negativity also. So if they're just going to keep throwing the same baseless random, illogical, negative stuff at you, it stops affecting you after sometime. And I've realised that people who are doing that are just unhappy with their own lives. Only an unhappy person can be negative against someone else consistently. Now I just feel sad for those unhappy people.

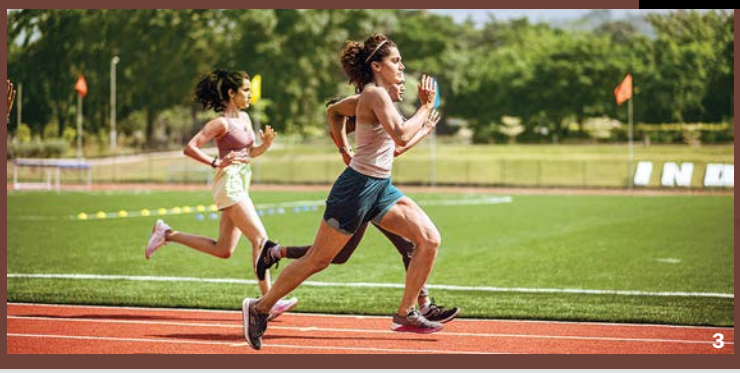
PINK GAVE OUT A STRONG MESSAGE THAT NO MEANS NO. _THAPPAD_ TOLD WOMEN TO STAND UP AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. SO ON ONE HAND THERE ARE SUCH MOVIES BEING MADE AND THEN THERE ARE SOME WHICH CONTINUE TO OBJECTIFY WOMEN. WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THAT?

Our films have helped normalise a lot of things. Change takes time. Decades of conditioning has made us feel a certain kind of behaviour is okay because it's shown in our films. Change won't happen overnight but it'll definitely happen if we collectively work towards it. It'll happen when every actress refuses to do something which isn't in keeping with her on-screen character. Most of the roles offered to women are written from a man's point of view. And we give in to that because our leading men are okay with it. Our heroes have to be more woke and open to seeing things from our point of view too. What I'm saying is that the change will come if everybody makes a conscious effort towards it.

CAN YOU NAME THREE OF YOUR FELLOW ACTRESSES FROM THE RECENT TIMES WHO HAVE HELPED MAKE THE INDUSTRY A BETTER PLACE FOR FEMALE ACTORS?

If I have to choose three names who've made the audience look at the female actors seriously then I'll name Vidya Balan, Tabu and Priyanka Chopra. Vidya because she did such mind-blowing films like *The Dirty Picture* and *Kahaani* back-to-back and showed us this is possible. Tabu because she always makes us curious about what she's going to next and Priyanka because of all that she's achieved not just here but abroad as well. All three have helped change perceptions about female actors for the better.

1 Do Baara
2 Haseen Dilruba
3 Rashmi Rocket
4 Thappad



YOU AMPLIFIED NETIZENS' REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES AMID THE PANDEMIC. AS A CELEBRITY DO YOU THINK THIS WAS THE TIME TO BE A REAL HERO OFF SCREEN?

As a public figure, all I can do is donate to the cause and help people in need connect with people who have the resources. I find this is a basic responsibility of a celebrity who the audience believes is their hero because of the characters and films we do on screen. I know we don't sign up to be the real hero when we perform in films but for someone like me who came from no film background and no additional support from the industry, audience is what made me into who I am today so this is the least I can do for them.

YOU EVEN SAID ON TWITTER THAT YOU STAYED ON THE TOXIC PLATFORM, BECAUSE YOU SAW HOW EVERYONE WAS HELPING EACH OTHER ON SOCIAL MEDIA...

I know that Twitter has turned toxic. Because everybody gets the right to say anything and everything to anyone, without any knowledge – most of the time. But yeah, there is always a flip side to the coin, right? So the pandemic really helped me to see that positive side of Twitter. This whole pandemic really made me see how humanity is not totally dead on Twitter and people still want to use the platform for helping each other. It was so nice to see that. Because I have been missing that side of people on Twitter for the longest time.

> *I ALWAYS END UP FINDING SO MANY HOLES IN MY PERFORMANCE AND THAT LEAVES ME UNDERWHELMED. AFTER WATCHING* THAPPAD, *I TOLD MY DIRECTOR ANUBHAV SINHA THAT I FELT EVERYONE WAS GOOD EXCEPT ME*

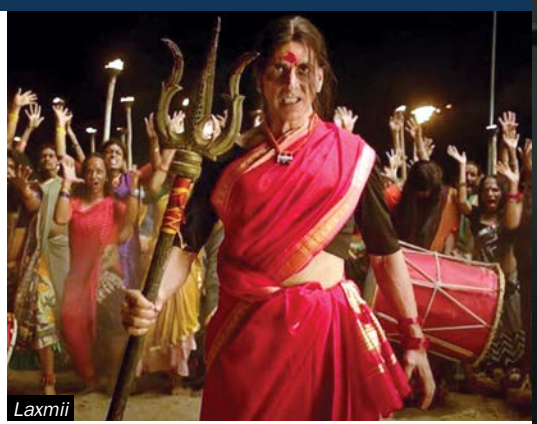
SHOOTER DADI CHANDRO TOMAR DIED OF COVID-19. HOW DID THE NEWS AFFECT YOU?

For the first few hours it was a feeling of disbelief because she had defied so many difficulties and hardships in her life. It almost felt like she would survive this also. I have been in touch with her family. So I knew she had been hospitalised. But they told me that she has been taken care of and she is all fine… and then suddenly that news came in… it was a big shock to me! I really hope that her last few days made her feel that she is content and happy with life. Because there are so many people who loved her. Her story has reached so many people and inspired so many people. I wish I could have gone to meet her. Because last time I met her she was in AIMMS for a treatment she was going through before the pandemic. And after that because of the pandemic I just couldn't go because I could have been a carrier. I don't know how I will feel if I go to Baghpat to her house. It will be a very awkward feeling to not have her around. Because I stayed in her house, practically in her room, for almost two months. That kind of haunts me even more mentally that she is no more.

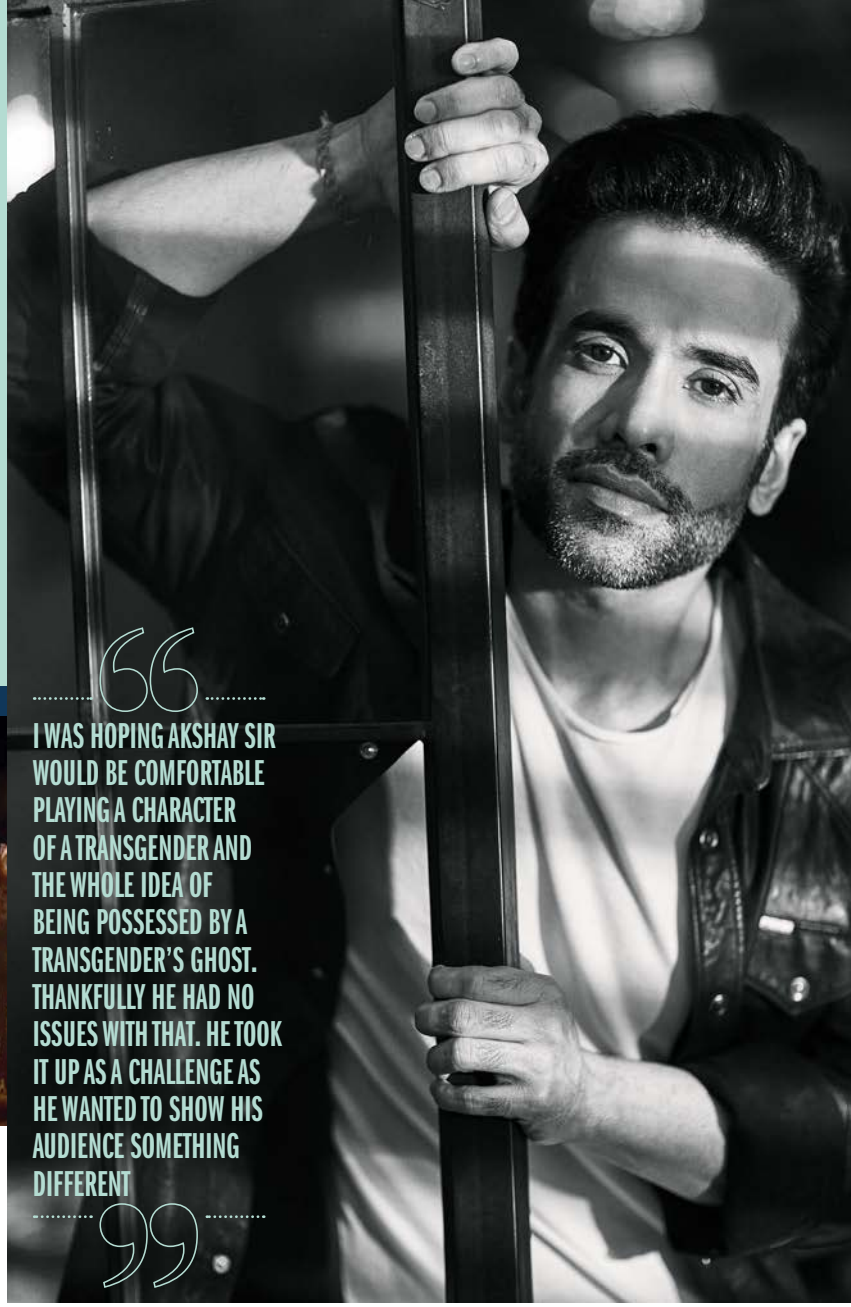
SHOW ME THE MONEY

TUSSHAR KAPOOR RECENTLY TURNED PRODUCER WITH *LAXMII.* **RAGHUVENDRA SINGH** SOUNDS HIM OUT ABOUT THE NEW VENTURE

Tusshar Kapoor has always impressed us with his sincerity. He's known to give his hundred per cent to every project and has made a name for himself as a dependable actor over the years. After dabbling in drama and action, he found his forte in comedy. He features prominently in Rohit Shetty comedies, as well as raunchy rom coms. Tusshar became the first celebrity to have a baby through surrogacy. Fatherhood very much becomes him and his son Laksshya completes him. He's been a hands-on father, not shying away from diaper duties. He's currently giving his son company during the online classes, reliving his own childhood all over again. His sister Ekta Kapoor has been the producer in the family and now Tusshar has followed suit. He launched his own production house, Tusshar Entertainment, sometime ago. The horror comedy *Laxmii*, starring Akshay Kumar, was the first film he produced under his own banner, in partnership with Fox Star Studios and Cape Of Good Hope Films. Excerpts from a tete-a-tete about the new changes and challenges of his life...



Laxmii



> I WAS HOPING AKSHAY SIR WOULD BE COMFORTABLE PLAYING A CHARACTER OF A TRANSGENDER AND THE WHOLE IDEA OF BEING POSSESSED BY A TRANSGENDER'S GHOST. THANKFULLY HE HAD NO ISSUES WITH THAT. HE TOOK IT UP AS A CHALLENGE AS HE WANTED TO SHOW HIS AUDIENCE SOMETHING DIFFERENT

What was your biggest challenge as a producer?
While the director is the captain of the ship, the producer is the wind that powers the sails. He has to be in control of every department. See that everyone is happy. And then keep track of the budgets and timelines. You don't know what's going to happen next and are constantly fire fighting. It's a roller coaster rider which only stops on the day of your film's release. And even after that, you have to keep track of the business reports, count your profits or losses and start planning for the next one.

Why did you choose to remake *Kanchana*?
When I watched *Kanchana* in 2012, I loved it. I thought it was a very massy, commercial and a unique subject. And horror-comedies were new at that time. They had not been explored as much as they are being explored now. So when I bought the rights, I decided to remake the film as my first venture as a producer. Given Akshay Kumar sir's success rate in comedy films he was the ideal choice for the main lead. He had done a successful horror comedy *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* in the past. This film needed a superstar to take it to the next level. I'm so happy that he agreed to do it.

How did you convince him to play a transgender in the film?
I was hoping that he would be comfortable playing a character of a transgender and the whole idea of being possessed by a transgender's ghost. Thankfully he had no issues with that. In fact, he agreed to do the film because his character goes through a transformation. He took it up as a challenge as he wanted to show his audience something different.

Were you unhappy by the fact that *Laxmii* got released over OTT?
There was a mental adjustment when we realised that the film was being slated for OTT. But there is a flip-side

to everything. We didn't have to worry about the whole COVID-19 aspect of it or any kind of piracy. The OTT platform is a great answer to the cinema shutdown. We knew that we would get the numbers even on the OTT. So the Friday fever remains intact. Given the new normal, we have been successful in bridging the gap between cinemas and OTT. I think it has been a game changer and it will set a trend for producers to not feel insecure about releasing a film on OTT platforms in this situation.

Laxmii has broken viewership records on OTT. Did you expect this since the curve of people watching OTT content was already high?

Our reaction was firstly that of relief. Because I'd spent seven years with this film and I wanted to get a positive reaction. I did expect the high numbers to some degree because the hype for the trailer had been huge. I was happy about it.

Now what's the next step for you as a producer?

Well, I already have another film that's ready and it's going to be announced shortly. It's a very different film from *Laxmii*. I'm going to act in it as well.

Did you ever take any tips regarding production from your sister Ekta?

Ekta is a pioneer in television production, and now even in the web space and she has produced a lot of films. The challenge of being a producer is one wherein you really learn on the job. The mistakes and the obstacles that I would have faced would be different from the ones she has faced. So you can never really use another's experience. Given my experience as an actor for the past 20 years and growing up in the industry, I have had a fair idea of what production really entails.

With Ganesh Acharya and Sharad Kelkar

WHILE THE DIRECTOR IS THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP, THE PRODUCER IS THE WIND THAT POWERS THE SAILS. HE HAS TO BE IN CONTROL OF EVERY DEPARTMENT. SEE THAT EVERYONE IS HAPPY. AND THEN KEEP TRACK OF THE BUDGETS AND TIMELINES. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT AND ARE CONSTANTLY FIRE FIGHTING

The experience of Akshay sir as a producer and Shabina Khan, my partner was there to bank upon. I really didn't have to take much advice from my family. Of course, the moral support is always there and if I was ever confused about something regarding legal or financial aspects, my mother and sister were always present. But that's just being a part of the family.

One piece of advice your father has given you that has always stayed with you.

One piece of advice my father has always given me and stayed with me is that don't brood over the past. What has happened… has happened. Otherwise you can really have sleepless nights about something that

doesn't deserve to be worried over. My dad is a patient and a calm man and that's what I want to emulate.

You had Akshay as your star and he carried the film on his shoulders. But if you are asked to produce a multi-starrer, would you be able to handle the stress and the many starry tantrums?
Well, I think what we have managed with *Laxmii* has laid a foundation for the bigger challenges. I haven't thought of producing a multi-starrer yet. Every film carries its own challenges. I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

If you had the following genres as a producer who would you pick as actors – romcom, horror-comedy and sex-comedy?
For a romcom definitely in today's day and age – Shahid Kapoor. For horror comedy, Akshay Kumar. And for sex comedy why not me? I have got the best track record in sex comedy, I won't take anyone else.

Is it safe to say that you can make friends in Bollywood?
Yes, definitely. Apart from actors or directors or producers, there are technicians you can be friendly to. There are assistants you can be friends with, there are journalists that I have close ties with. But in life like in Bollywood, the lesser friends, the better friends.

With son Lakshyya

> THE MORAL SUPPORT IS ALWAYS THERE AND IF I WAS EVER CONFUSED ABOUT SOMETHING REGARDING LEGAL OR FINANCIAL ASPECTS, MY MOTHER AND SISTER WERE ALWAYS PRESENT. BUT THAT'S JUST BEING A PART OF THE FAMILY

One film of yours you would love showing your son.
I have not started showing him films yet. But I am waiting to show him the *Golmaal* series soon. And I would probably not show him *Shootout At Lokhandwala* yet, because there is too much violence in it.

The weirdest question your son has ever asked you?
As per his age he is very curious and he keeps asking me why for everything. If I say I am going out – why? If I say I am going for work – why? I love his curiosity and I keep answering all his questions.

What do you do when you get angry?
When I get angry, it takes me a while to get it out of my system. Of course, I am trying to change that about myself. But the first reaction is I lose sleep. I start getting all the anger out in the middle of the night, and I don't get enough sleep. So that's very unhealthy and I'm trying to get out of that.

You've always chosen to be low-profile. Was it a wise decision in hindsight?
Yes, I have stayed low profile as far as my personal life is concerned. But I have never shied away from publicising my films at the time of their release. I don't like catching headlines for anything and everything. It's more of a ego-booster, which I don't really need after 20 years in the industry. ■

ROAR OF THE TIGER

ADARSH GOURAV SPEAKS TO **VEDANSHI PATHAK** ABOUT BAGGING A BAFTA NOMINATION FOR HIS PERFORMANCE IN *THE WHITE TIGER,* WHICH ALSO HAD AN OSCAR NOMINATION IN THE BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY CATEGORY

Life has peaked for Adarsh Gourav in a big way post the release of his Netflix film *The White Tiger*. Directed by Ramin Bahrani, the film also stars Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Rajkummar Rao in crucial roles. Adarsh's performance as the protagonist Balram Halwai, who fights societal norms to rise from being a lowly driver to being a multimillionaire entrepreneur is spot on. The film offers a critique on how the Indian society is still stuck in the morass of caste and religious divide and states that we need to come out of it pronto if we ever want to become a first world nation. Till then, the only way up for the marginalised is to use whatever comes their way to claw ahead, even if these opportunities are amoral in nature. It's a powerhouse performance that ranged from him being a submissive mouse to being transformed into a hungry tiger unafraid to use his fangs. It's no wonder that Adarsh was nominated in the Best Actor category by the British Academy of Films and Television Arts (BAFTA). Though he eventually lost out to Sir Anthony Hopkins (*The Father*), it was still a proud moment for India that he got nominated. *The White Tiger* was also nominated at the Oscars in the Best Adapted Screenplay category and Adarsh is excited about that as well. We chat with the actor about the global recognition coming his way and how that's changing his life and career choices.

With Ramin Bahrani, Rajkummar Rao and Priyanka Chopra Jonas

YOU MUST BE OVER THE MOON BEING NOMINATED ALONGSIDE NAMES LIKE ANTHONY HOPKINS, CHADWICK BOSEMAN AND MADS MIKKELSEN FOR THE BAFTA?
It feels like a dream to be nominated amongst my childhood heroes, Sir Anthony Hopkins and Mads Mikkelsen. It is a dream for any actor and honestly it's shocking and unexpected too. I wasn't upset when I lost because being nominated itself was a big deal for me. I have my whole career ahead of me to get nominated multiple times. This is only the beginning of my journey.

BAFTA WAS CRITICISED LAST TIME FOR NOT BEING TOO OPEN TO DIVERSITY IN THE TOP CATEGORIES. ACCORDING TO YOU, DID THAT CHANGE THIS YEAR? WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THE CONTROVERSY?
I actually wasn't aware of that criticism. But I'm glad that there are

MORE THAN THE PRESSURE, WHAT I FEEL IS THE SPIKE IN EXCITEMENT. I WANT TO CONTINUE DOING GOOD WORK AND GROW AS AN ACTOR. I WANT TO CONSTANTLY KEEP LEARNING NEW THINGS AND KEEP PLAYING MORE AND MORE DIVERSE CHARACTERS

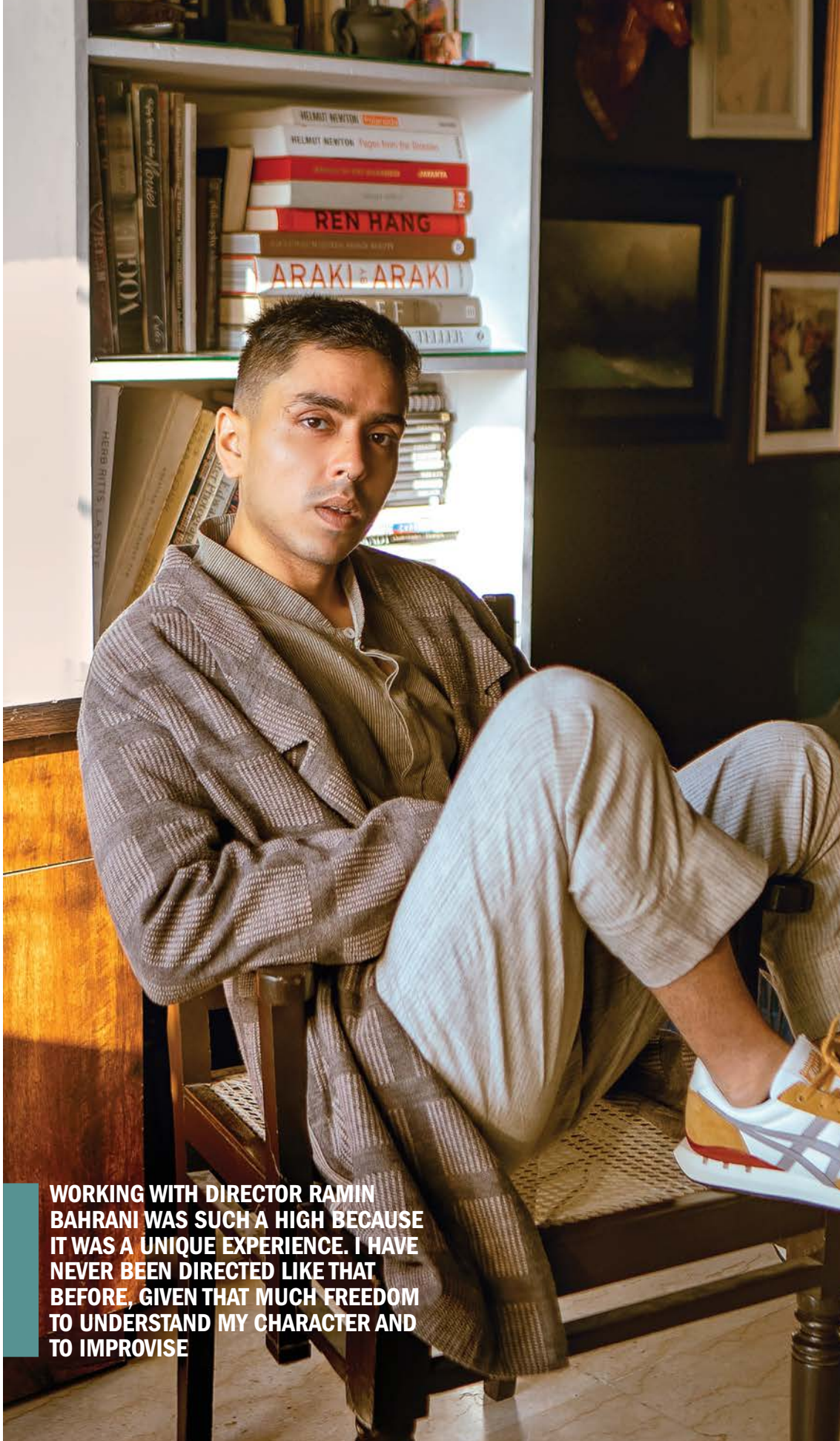
different actors from different ethnicities being nominated because it is important for people all over the world to know about one another's cultures and stories. What's a better way than casting actors from different ethnicities to actually represent their side of the world. It's a great way for people to get to know one another.

WHAT YOUR FAMILY'S REACTION ABOUT THE BAFTA NOMINATIUON?

My family has been over the moon since the trailer released. They have been glued to their phones ever since. They share all the articles and the interviews of mine with everybody on the family WhatsApp group. I feel both embarrassed and happy by their behaviour. They are truly proud, also relieved in a way, I guess.

HOW DID THE NEWS OF THE NOMINATION REACH YOU?

It wasn't just one person who broke the news. My agents in the US called me up, as did my father. Friends in the media too sent in their messages. Fellow actors started calling in, offering their praise. Then, social media is the big thing today. Everything gets splashed there as



WORKING WITH DIRECTOR RAMIN BAHRANI WAS SUCH A HIGH BECAUSE IT WAS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE. I HAVE NEVER BEEN DIRECTED LIKE THAT BEFORE, GIVEN THAT MUCH FREEDOM TO UNDERSTAND MY CHARACTER AND TO IMPROVISE

The White Tiger

I WASN'T UPSET WHEN I LOST (AT THE BAFTA) BECAUSE BEING NOMINATED ITSELF WAS A BIG DEAL FOR ME. I HAVE MY WHOLE CAREER AHEAD OF ME TO GET NOMINATED MULTIPLE TIMES. THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF MY JOURNEY

soon as it happens. So that surprise factor no longer exists, as the news gets picked up at the speed of light.

GLOBAL RECOGNITION LIKE THE BAFTA AND THE OSCARS HAS PUT YOU ON THE WORLD MAP IN A BIG WAY. THE EXPECTATIONS FROM YOU HAVE INCREASED. DO YOU FEEL THE PRESSURE?

More than the pressure, what I feel is the spike in excitement. I want to continue doing good work and grow as an actor. I want to constantly keep learning new things and keep playing more and more diverse characters. I'm just hoping that the recognition gives me more opportunities to work with the directors I want to and to create work that inspires me. I hope that this happens within India as well as globally.

HOW DID *THE WHITE TIGER* HELP YOU EVOLVE AS AN ACTOR?

The White Tiger really made me realise that the more time I spend on understanding the character the better it is. It's like any other thing. It's the universal truth. I had the luxury of four months to understand Balram's role during which I went on this journey and I feel that's my biggest lesson. Also, working with director Ramin Bahrani was such a high because it was a unique experience. I've never been directed like that before, given that much freedom to understand my character and to improvise. I also feel I've become a better listener after working on that film. Apart from that, playing Balram really helped me empathise more with people and understand them better.

YOU REPORTEDLY WORKED IN A TEA STALL TO GET YOUR CHARACTER RIGHT?

One thing Ramin told me is to not read Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and rely on the screenplay to get the job done. Of course, I skimmed through the book in order to understand the character better. Ramin advised me to arrive at my own truth about the character and that's why I asked one of my friends to take me to his native village in Jharkhand, where I did work for some time at a tea stall in order to understand the angst of someone like Balram.

RAMIN BAHRANI IS SAID TO HAVE SEARCHED FOR 'REAL ACTORS' TO BE CAST IN *THE WHITE TIGER*. HOW DID YOU FIT INTO THAT SCHEME OF THINGS?

That could be better answered by Ramin. I guess what really helped me in understanding Balram was that I spent my formative years in Jamshedpur, which is closer to the region where Balram actually belonged to. So I had an understanding of those people and their culture. As Ramin mentioned in a lot of his interviews, he wanted to cast a lesser-known actor for the part. I guess both these reasons helped me get the part. He's always worked with people who almost have had no history in acting and then the kind of performances he extracts out of those people, it's unbelievable. You feel like you are watching a documentary.

AS AN INDIAN ACTOR, YOU MUST'VE NEVER IMAGINED YOUR OTT FILM TO TAKE THE NUMBER ONE SPOT IN 64 COUNTRIES IN JUST FOUR WEEKS. WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO IT?

It was supposed to be a Netflix global film and it was supposed to release in many countries. But to see our film do so well across the globe is reassuring because it is such a universal story. People from all over the world connected to it. All our hearts are full of gratitude for all the records that it set.

FAREWELL, VANRAJ BHATIA

DEVESH SHARMA OFFERS A BRIEF PROFILE OF THE RENOWNED COMPOSER, WHO PASSED AWAY RECENTLY

(MAY 31, 1927 - MAY 7, 2021)

For the masses, his most popular song remains *Tumhare bin ji na lage ghar mein* from *Bhumika* (1977). Picturised on Smta Patil, it was written by Majrooh Sultanpuri and sung by Preeti Sagar. She was just a chit of a girl back then, famous for her *My heart is beating* song from *Julie* (1975). It's said that people told Vanraj Bhatia to choose another singer as Preeti was considered too westernised for a classical-based song. But he stuck to his guns and came out with his most famous song in the process. *Saawan ke din aaye,* a duet Preeti sang with Bhupinder, too became famous. The use of trumpet at the start provided another dimension to the song. It wasn't that she was totally untested. He had made her sing the highly intricate composition, the heavy duty Quli Qutub Shah *ghazal Piya baaj pyala piya jaye na* from *Nishant* (1975), which is another rare gem from Bhatia's repertoire.

He's known to have worked more with Asha Bhosle but one song of his, *Barse ghan saari raat,* from *Tarang* (1984), sung by Lata Mangeshkar, was described by the late composer himself as one of his most difficult songs. And he marvelled at how Lata sang it in one take.

It's ironic that Vanraj, who is known for his Indian classical and folk inspired melodies, was actually a trained composer in the Western heritage. After getting his M.A. (English Honours) from Elphinstone College, University of Bombay in 1949, Vanraj studied composition with Howard Ferguson, Alan Bush and William Alwyn at the Royal Academy of Music, London, where he was a recipient of the Sir Michael Costa Scholarship (1951–54). After graduating with a gold medal in 1954, Bhatia won a Rockefeller Scholarship (1954–58) as well as a French Government Scholarship (1957–58) that allowed him to study with the hallowed French composer and teacher Nadia Boulanger at the *Conservatoire de Paris* for five years. Vanraj belonged to a Kutchi businessmen family who reportedly used to make fun of his love for music and thought he should give it up and join the family business. His father sponsored his trip to England on the condition that he should return home after six months if he failed to

Vanraj, known for his Indian classical and folk inspired melodies, was actually a trained composer in the Western heritage

Ajooba

Ghatak

Chameli

With Shyam Benegal

Pardes

Vanraj Bhatia is credited as being the first person to score music for an ad film, and went on to create around 7000 jingles

win a scholarship. But such was his brilliance that he continued to win one scholarship after another. It's not as if he was unaware of Hindustani classical music. He had studied under the Deodhar school of music and was versed in its intricacies as well. It's said that he was mesmerised after hearing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and that led him to develop an interest in Western classical music. Despite living in Paris, he reportedly spent his free time practicing music, rather than visiting its famous bistros and cafes. He was said to be extremely fond of the opera and travelled to Europe to see it being performed.

Perhaps, in hindsight, he made a mistake returning to India, instead of pursuing a career in the West. He returned penniless and to make ends meet, accepted the newly-minted post of the Reader in Western Musicology at the University of Delhi from 1960 to 1965. It wasn't to his liking as there were hardly any students of Western music theory in Delhi at the time. The authorities too, perhaps blinded by nationalistic fervour, didn't see a future for such a stream. The composer thankfully got the opportunity to attend international seminars in Asia and Europe, furthering his knowledge. He's credited as being the first person to score music for an ad film, and went on to create around 7000 jingles. Some of them, for Shakti Silk Sarees, Lyril, Garden Vareily and Dulux are still remembered today.

He came in contact with Shyam Benegal during his advertising stint. The well-known ad and documentary filmmaker was thinking of trying his hand in feature films and asked Vanraj to compose the music for his directorial debut *Ankur* (1974). He went on to score for almost all of Benegal's films down the years. Perhaps he

Vanraj Bhatia

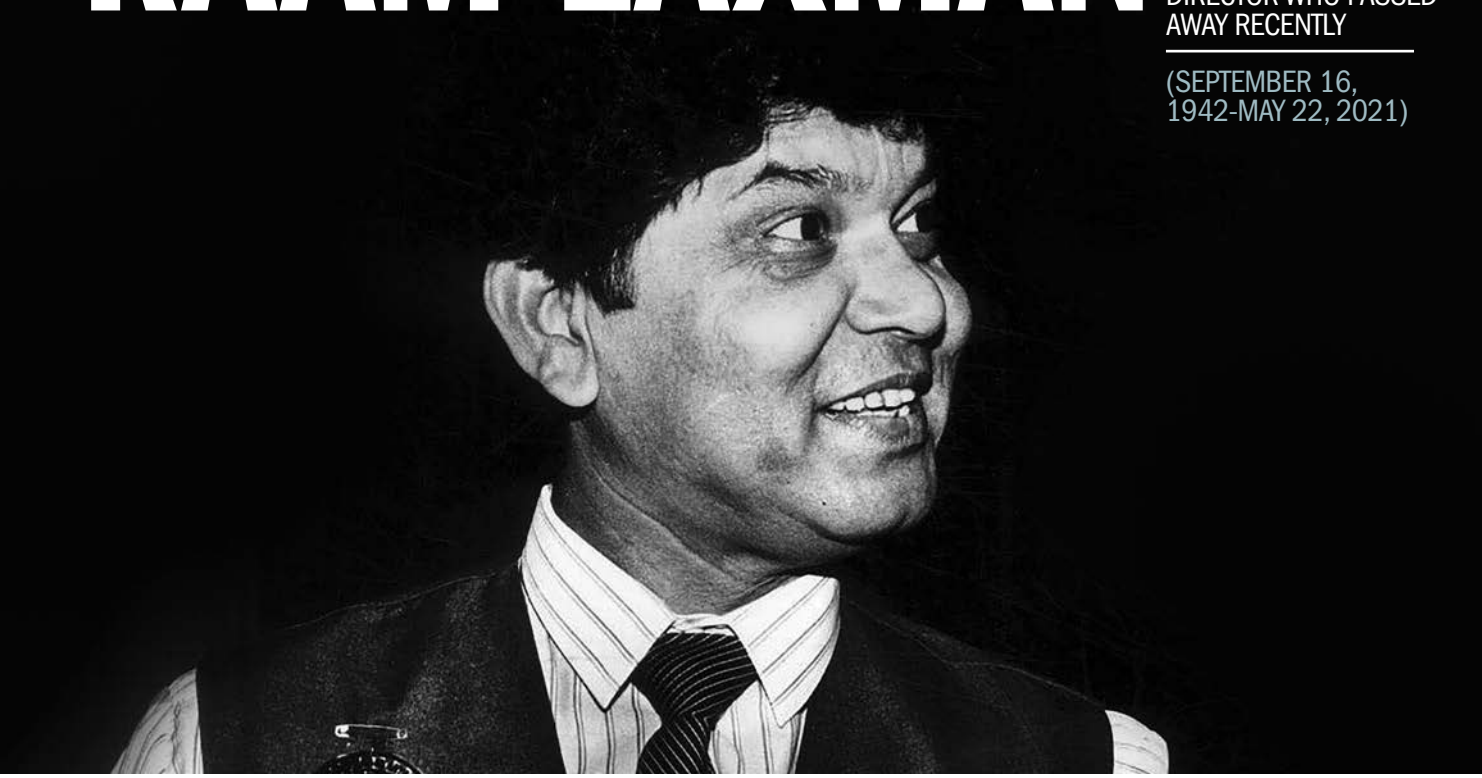
became so steeped in Benegal's way of making films that he could only relate to the art world. He collaborated with other noted art filmmakers like Govind Nihalani, (whose *Tamas* won Vanraj a National Film Award for Best Music Direction), Kundan Shah (*Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*), Aparna Sen (*36 Chowringhee Lane*), Saeed Akhtar Mirza (*Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho!)* Kumar Shahani (*Tarang*), Vidhu Vinod Chopra (*Khamosh*), Vijaya Mehta (*Pestonjee*) and Prakash Jha (*Hip Hip Hurray*). Though he couldn't work in the haphazard environment of mainstream cinema as a film song composer, he nevertheless made a name for himself when it came to background music. *Ajooba* (1991), *Ghatak* (1996), *Pardes* (1997) and *Chameli* (2003), remain some of his famous BGM scores. He also gave music in TV serials like *Khandaan* (1985), *Katha Sagar* (1986), *Yatra* (1986) and *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988). He also composed music in the Western classical discipline. His most frequently performed works are the Fantasia and Fugue in C for piano, the Sinfonia Concertante for strings, and the song cycle Six Seasons. He wrote an opera *Agni Varsha,* based on Girish Karnad's play of the same name, which premiered in New York City in 2012 in a production featuring soprano Judith Kellock.

The composer died on May 7, at his Mumbai residence. He was 93 at the time. ■

REMEMBERING RAAM LAXMAN

DEVESH SHARMA SKETCHES THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE VETERAN MUSIC DIRECTOR WHO PASSED AWAY RECENTLY

(SEPTEMBER 16, 1942-MAY 22, 2021)

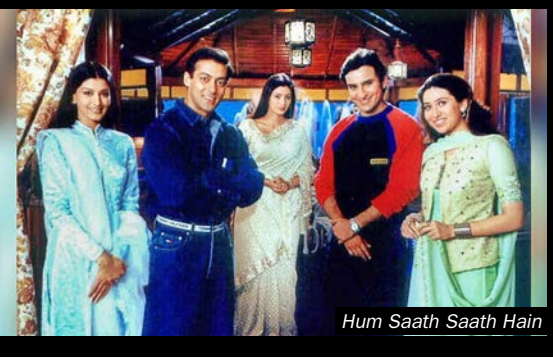


No one today remembers the movie *Hum Se Badhkar Kaun* (1981) but the song *Deva o deva Ganpati deva* from the film is aired at full blast from every Ganpati pandal during the 11-day festival of Ganeshotsav. The film had music by Raam Laxman, who had the knack of coming up with hugely popular numbers from time to time throughout his career. If only he was consistent, he would have been counted as one of the greats of Hindi film music. Nevertheless, this shy, reticent composer did enjoy his share of popularity. *Hum Se Badhkar Kaun* had another good number, *Dekho logon yeh kaisa zamana,* sung by Asha Bhosle and Mohammed Rafi. It reminds one somewhat of Bappi Lahri's compositions and was one of the last songs sung by Rafi.

They say goodwill and friendship is the adhesive that holds this industry together. Raam Laxman is a prime example of it. His actual name is Vijay Patil. He was friends with Surendra Kadam, the Raam to his Laxman. It was the era where having a *jodi* of music directors was considered lucky or auspicious. Hence Vijay formed a partnership with Surendra and the two friends began their journey together in the '70s. A story goes that it was veteran Marathi comedian and filmmaker Dada Kondke who christened them as Raam-Laxman, when he asked them to compose the music of his Marathi film *Pandu Havaldar (*1975). The music proved to be a hit and their career took a flying start. They got a chance to compose for Rajshri Productions' *Agent Vinod* (1977), an espionage drama based on the lines of James Bond films, starring Mahendra Sandhu. However, Surendra unexpectedly passed away in 1976. To

Vijay Patil formed a partnership with Surendra Kadam and the two friends began their journey together in the '70s as Raam Laxman

Maine Pyar Kiya


Hum Saath Saath Hain

Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!

Patthar Ke Phool

Hamse Badhkar Kaun

Hum Aapke Hain Koun..! had a whopping 14 tracks and each one proved to be a hit. It's perhaps the last big hit of Lata Mangeshkar's career as well

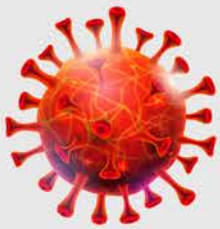
keep the friendship alive, Vijay took the *nom de plume* Raam Laxman and composed music under it in his four-decades-long career. His association with Rajshri Productions took off with *Agent Vinod.* They immediately signed him for another film, *Taraana* (1979), starring Mithun Chakraborty and Ranjeeta. The musical love story had hit songs like *Sultana sultana,* sung by Usha Mangeshkar, *Gunche lage hai kehne* and *Meri dilruba tujhko aana padega,* both sung by Shailendra Singh. It's said the composer developed a friendship with the baritone-voiced singer and considered him as one of the best he has ever worked with. Raam Laxman was able to offer something different even to masala potboilers. Consider *Hum Se Hai Zamana* (1983) for instance. It had a wonderfully nonsensical song in the mould of RD Burman in *Kolaba kuiba kuiba kuiba,* sung by Lata Mangeshkar. Its title song, as well as the bhangra-like *Tenu mainu dekhe zamana,* too became popular. *Woh Jo Hasina* (1983), remains forgotten but it contains one rare lullaby sung by Kishore Kumar in *Chand chal tu zara dheeme dheeme.*

Raam Laxman had always been close to Rajshri Productions and his biggest break came when Sooraj Barjatya asked him to compose the music for his directorial debut *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989). The film had 11 songs and all proved superhit. The composer introduced the hit South Indian singer, SP Balasubrahmanyam as the voice of Salman Khan and the move proved to be a masterstroke. Lata Mangeshkar too, who was slowly losing her hold as the numero uno singer in the film industry, got one of the biggest hits of her career. Songs like *Dil deewana bin sajna ke maane na, Kabootar ja ja ja, Aaja shaam hone aayi,* in fact the entire list ruled the airwaves and are still popular today. The music director deservedly won the Filmfare Award for his sublime effort. Because *Maine Pyar Kiya* became a hit, it's said Salman Khan recommended Raam Laxman's name for his *Patthar Ke Phool* (1991). It was the debut film of Raveena Tandon and had hit songs like *Tum se dekhte hi pyar hua* and *Kabhi tu challiya lagta hai.* His next hit, *100 Days* (1991), starring Madhuri Dixit and Jackie Shroff, had popular songs like *Sun beliya, shukriya meharbaani, Le le dil,* and the nonsensical *Gabbar Singh yeh kehkar gaya.*

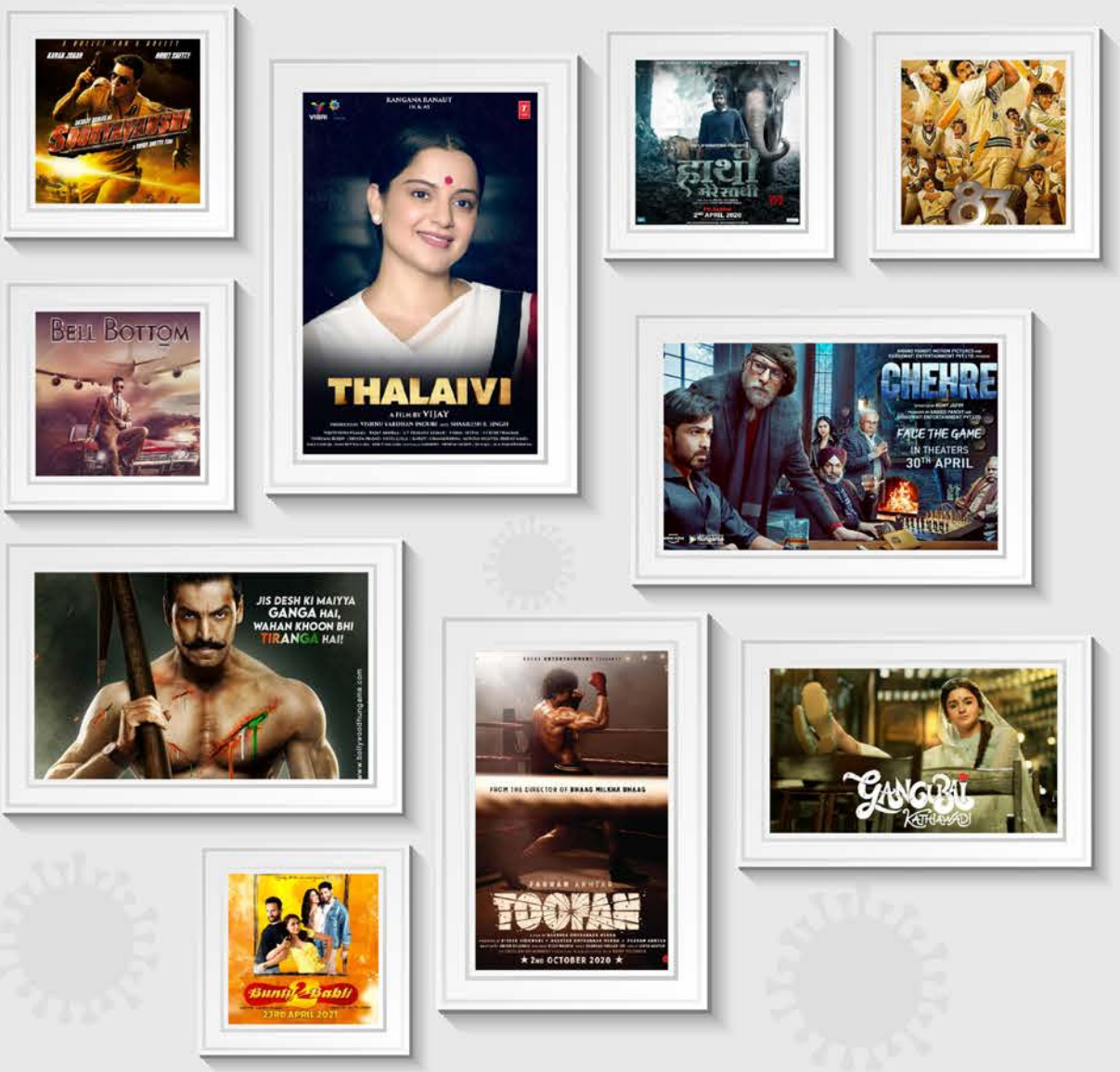
His best was yet to come. Sooraj Barjatya turned to Raam Laxman again for his family saga *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994). This thinly disguised marriage video had a whopping 14 tracks and each one again proved to be a hit. It's perhaps the last big hit of Lata Mangeshkar's career as well. Be it *Maye ni maye, Didi tera devar deewana, Joote do paise do, Waah waah Ramji*, or the title song, they have made a home in our hearts. Today, where multiple composers are the norm and one, two hummable songs come out of the whole album, this achievement looks miraculous indeed. His last outing with Rajshri, *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (1999) had only seven tracks in comparison and wasn't as successful. Still, *Maiyya Yashoda* and *Mhare hiwda mein* are remembered even today.

It's said the composer suffered a brain stroke 10 years ago and chose to settle in Nagpur, his native place. He died of a heart attack on May 22, 2021, at the age of 78. He may have passed on but will forever be alive in the memory of his fans through his music ... ■

HOW'S THE WORLD'S LARGEST FILM INDUSTRY COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC?



MAYUKH MAJUMDAR FIGURES OUT HOW THE BUSINESS OF CINEMA FARED UNDER THE PANDEMIC



While industry insiders remain cautiously optimistic about the immediate future of the Hindi film industry, the numbers tell a different tale altogether. In the first quarter of 2020, Bollywood's box office report card stood at approximately Rs 1,150 crores. Compare that to the March quarter of 2021 which saw Bollywood's box office earnings barely crossing Rs 50 crores. According to data compiled by consulting firm Ormax Media and reported by Business Standard Newspaper, a billion movie tickets were sold in 2019. The total amount from ticket sales was around Rs 10, 948 crs. Around a third were from Hindi movies, 19 per cent from Tamil industry and 18 per cent from Telugu. The contrast couldn't have been starker in 2021. It was estimated that the movie business would crash by as much as 70 per cent this year. It's freefall as far as the entertainment industry is concerned.

The second wave of corona virus has only compounded the filmmakers' problems, who were already reeling from the lockdown last year. When the lockdown was suddenly announced last year,the industry was still hopeful that things would be normal in about three months and that things would be back to normal in no time. Honestly, no one thought the coronavirus would pan out like this. So film shootings were stalled, movie releases postponed. When the theatres were re-opened last year, it seemed things would improve. The box office collections of 2021 releases like South's *Master* and Hollywood movie *Godzilla vs Kong* further ignited hope. While *Master* collected Rs 200 crs, *Godzilla vs Kong* did a business of Rs 46 crs in India. Besides this the list of movies to be released in 2021 looked strong. Yash Raj films had some five movies on its roster. The release dates of movies like Kabir Khan's *'83*, Rohit Shetty's *Sooryavanshi* and *Satyamev Jayate 2* were announced. But with the second lockdown the release dates have once again gone haywire. With every delay, the interest rates mount adding to the cost. Trade pundits point out that *Sooryavanshi,* made on a budget of Rs125 crs could have made around 200 crs at the box office during normal times. The makers would have sold the movie to an OTT platform for about 25 crs, they'd have earned around 20 crs from music and satellite rights. Now it's losing money every day because of the accruing interest. *Angrezi Medium* had a nominal loss of Rs 10 crs. The conservative estimate of both *Radhe* and *Laxmii* was around Rs 200 crs each. *Laxmii* was sold to an OTT platform for around Rs125 crs, which means it made a loss of around Rs 75 crs.

Most trade analysts have written off the first quarter of this year. According to them, the recovery will start only by September this year. Sitting in June, this seems highly optimistic. They however reiterate that the industry will take a 70-80 per cent hit as compared to the previous years. While the entire industry is facing a crunch

IN THE OVERSEAS MARKETS AND ALL MARKETS WHERE THE VIRUS HAS BEEN CONTAINED, WHETHER IT'S CHINA, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA OR THE US, THE BOX OFFICE IS DOING EXCEEDINGLY WELL. IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 2021, CHINA HAS ALREADY DONE THREE BILLION DOLLARS IN THEIR DOMESTIC MARKET – KAMAL GIANCHANDANI, CEO, PVR PICTURES

FILMS DELAYED DUE TO COVID-19

THALAIVI

Budget: ₹ 65 crores (approx.)
It was slated for an April 23, 2021 release but has been postponed for now.

SOORYAVANSHI

Budget: ₹ 125 crores (approx.)
It was slated for an April 30, 2021 release but has been postponed indefinitely.

HAATHI MERE SAATHI

The Tamil version *Kaadan* and the Telugu version *Aranya* released on March 26, 2021. The theatrical release of the Hindi version of this film has been postponed.

today, the Hindi film industry is particularly in dire straits. That's because even when the theatres reopened briefly, the industry didn't rush in to release the movies. It was kind of testing waters to see if the people would come back to the theatres. True enough, the footfall was miniscule. The only two movies released in the interim period were *Roohi* and *Mumbai Saga*. And the total collection this year is just about Rs 50 crs. Questions were raised if the audience would ever walk into the theatres in the times of covid. Right now, no one knows when the projectors will be fired up again. The future indeed looks bleak for the film industry, till at least the coronavirus looms large. With a more severe second wave in progress, it'll be a while before the film industry limps back to normalcy.

THIS IS A 140-YEAR-OLD INDUSTRY AND IT HAS SEEN DISRUPTIONS IN TECHNOLOGY COMING FROM DVDS AND TELEVISION AND OTT. IT HAS SEEN DISRUPTIONS COMING FROM WARS AND PAST PANDEMICS BUT IT ALWAYS BOUNCES BACK – SANJEEV KUMAR BIJLI, JOINT MANAGING DIRECTOR, PVR LIMITED

According to Vinod Bhanushali, President of Marketing, Media & Publishing (TV), Music Acquisition of T-Series and the co-producer of T-Series Films, "If a film like *Tanhaji* or *Kabir Singh* had released in these COVID times, we would have never understood the potential of the films, namely the possibility of them hitting 300 crores. We would have had to sell it to OTT platforms at a lower cost which would be based on the actor's previous runs at the box office. The loss of money for the films which couldn't start on time is something which we have to bear, and even post lockdown we will never get the full capacity benefit till COVID-19 is totally gone."

What's made life difficult for most producers is the COVID-19 protocols, which have to be followed on the sets while shooting. These increase the cost and thus add to the losses. Also when the lockdown was announced last year most sets had to be dismantled. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Gangubai Kathiawadi* set and Boney Kapoor's *Maidaan* set had to be brought down. Last year, *Maidaan's* set was taken down because of the pandemic and this year, it suffered damages because of Cyclone Tauktae. Producer Boney Kapoor will reportedly have to shell out an additional seven crores to offset the damage, once the shooting commences after the lockdown. If you add 10-12 per cent as inflation cost, the numbers escalate quickly.

Trade analyst Taran Adarsh estimates the industry losses at anywhere between Rs1500 crs to Rs 2000 crs, if not more. Some trade pundits say the number could be as high as Rs 3000cr to 4000 crs. If you take into account the interest rates, the salaries paid, maintenance charges, jobs lost, sets dismantled and rebuilt again and the cost of maintaining covid protocols, then the picture looks bleaker still.

IF I HAD TO PUT A NUMBER TO IT, IN REGARDS TO HINDI CINEMA, I THINK WE HAVE LOST APPROXIMATEL RS 1500 CRORES TO RS 2000 CRORES. IN FACT, IT COULD BE MORE
– TRADE ANALYST TARAN ADARSH

Says Taran, "We are facing the second wave right now which is far more lethal than the first wave. We really don't know till when this is going to continue and now, we are back to square one with theatres being shut. From the common man's point of view, when you hear and read about COVID-19 and you see the statistics about the deaths and the lack of oxygen, entertainment does not even feature on the list anymore. Right now, it's a little difficult to calculate the losses because few films went to OTT platforms and suddenly, when the scenario seemed better, a lot of producers announced their films. A few films were also released in theatres like *Roohi* and *Mumbai Saga*. We are heading for a very

uncertain future....."

Taran cites *Radhe* as a case in point and says Salman Khan went for a hybrid release as the film was delayed for a year and the interest was piling up. Says he, "If you take a home loan, you have to pay an interest on it every month. That goes for a movie, as well. Talking about Salman Khan, he was supposed to release *Radhe* last year on Eid. He couldn't do that because of the lockdown. Somewhere in January, when things began looking up, he said that he's standing by the theatres and he would release *Radhe* in May 2021. Hence, when the second wave came in, many wondered what he was going to do. Salman Khan is financially sound but every film has a certain budget and you cannot exceed a particular amount that has been sanctioned. Now, if the film had been delayed for a year, the interest factor that Salman Khan Productions would have had to pay would have been enormous. So, Salman Khan decided to not delay the film any further..... and how long could he wait?"

The worst hit, it seems, are the exhibitors. The estimated loss of the exhibition industry is around 1500 crs. Many top multiplex chains which are listed on the Sensex have dropped their share prices due to no business. On the other hand, there are several small theatres which have had to completely shut down. Trade analysts reckon that the first lockdown led to the shutdown of around 1,500 screens - a number which will only increase given the second lockdown

Kamal Gianchandani, CEO of PVR Pictures is heartened by the fact that the majority of producers are holding out for a theatrical release. He's also optimistic about people coming back to the theatres. "Looking at the box office signals that we got in January, February and March, we feel very confident that there has been no change in the customer habits. In fact, there is a pent-up demand and people want to come to cinemas by force. An overwhelming number of producers have decided to wait until theatres reopen. Also, in the overseas markets and all markets where the virus has been contained, whether it's China, Japan, Australia or the US, the box office is doing exceedingly well. In the first three months of 2021, China has already done $3 billion in their domestic market. And, this is without there being Hollywood films. Only with their local films, they have managed to do three billion dollars worth of box office collections till April 15, which gives a very positive signal that, in any market where the virus has been contained, people come back to theatres in big numbers," he hopes.

Filmmaker Mozez Singh says that every producer now has a COVID-19

"IF A FILM LIKE *TANHAJI* OR *KABIR SINGH* HAD RELEASED IN THESE COVID TIMES, WE WOULD HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE POTENTIAL OF THE FILMS, NAMELY THE POSSIBILITY OF THEM HITTING 300 CRORES. WE WOULD HAVE HAD TO SELL IT TO OTT PLATFORMS AT A LOWER COST

– VINOD BHANUSHALI, PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, MEDIA & PUBLISHING (TV), MUSIC ACQUISITION OF T-SERIES

FILMS DELAYED DUE TO COVID-19

CHEHRE

It was slated for a release on July 17, 2020. Then it was postponed to April 9, 2021. Now after the second wave of coronavirus it has been further postponed.

BUNTY AUR BABLI 2

It was scheduled to release on June 26, 2020.There's no news on its new release date.

'83

It has an estimated budget of around Rs 125 crores. The Initial release date was April 10, 2020 which was pushed to December 25, 2020. Now, it is scheduled to release on June 4, 2021 but that too looks uncertain.

FILMS DELAYED DUE TO COVID-19

BELL BOTTOM

Bell Bottom was scheduled to release on May 28, 2021.

TOOFAN

It was initially supposed to release on October 2, 2020 which was postponed to September 18, 2020. It was supposed to stream on Amazon Prime Video on May 21 but that has also been postponed now.

SATYAMEVA JAYATE 2

It has an estimated budget of ₹ 50 crores.This was slated for a May 13 release but has been indefinitely postponed.

GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI

It was slated to release on July 30, 2021 but it's doubtful if it will.

contingency built into their contract to help tide things over. While everyone is still focusing on their health and wellness, it is evident to all that the virus isn't going anywhere soon. "When the next virus wave comes, we should have systems in place that will allow us to work in a way which is safe and still substantial. Halting everything is not the solution. It's difficult for theatrical business to recover soon, but now theatrical business is competing with same day releases on OTT platforms. For example, *Radhe* released with a ticket price of Rs 249. So, power will temporarily move to platforms," Singh says.

As for the future of the big screen, no one is beating its death knell yet. Even those who have suffered financial losses remain optimistic. Sanjeev Kumar Bijli, Joint Managing Director of PVR Limited says that PVR saw four-and-a-half lakh admissions for *Roohi* and two-and-a-half lakh admissions for *Mumbai Saga* nationwide. The response to *Mumbai Saga* was muted because it was one of the last films playing in cinemas when the second wave of COVID-19 hit. Before PVR shut down for the lockdown in 2020, they saw a whopping amount of 100 million admissions. Bijli is hopeful simply because when things got better in India after the first wave, filmmakers rushed to announce release dates for their movies. From *Thalaivi, Gangubai Kathiawadi* to *Sooryavanshi,* there was a rush to release trailers, teasers and posters. "It's difficult to recuperate after the losses sustained in 2020. A loss is a loss and I don't think we can make up for those losses. Our only hope is that we open as soon as possible and that there is no third wave of the coronavirus. There is, of course, talk of a third wave but I think that can be minimised if the nation-wide vaccination program really becomes aggressive. It's not even at the brink of where it should be. We are vaccinating very few people. We've seen examples from the US, UK, Israel and many parts of Europe. It's the only way to ensure that the impact of any other wave is minimised. I'd estimate that we will open now by the end of June because numbers are going down. I hope we're able to get films and people start going back to the cinemas..... It's going to be a slow burn but I think we'll get there because the fundamentals of the business are very strong. The need to go out and watch cinema is very strong," he comments.

WHEN THE NEXT VIRUS WAVE COMES, WE SHOULD HAVE SYSTEMS IN PLACE THAT WILL ALLOW US TO WORK IN A WAY WHICH IS SAFE AND STILL SUBSTANTIAL. HALTING EVERYTHING IS NOT THE SOLUTION

– FILMMAKER MOZEZ SINGH

Bijli believes that the future of theatres in India remains strong - even if we're in this situation for another year. Says he, "This is a 140-year-old industry and it has seen disruptions in technology coming from DVDs and television and OTT. It has seen disruptions coming from wars and past pandemics but it always bounces back because there is that social need for humans to go out with friends and family to watch a movie in a darkened theatre and share that experience with everyone else. It is still the cheapest form of entertainment in India. It's a holistic form of family entertainment. This is a blip and this blip is only because of a pandemic nobody had foreseen." ■

your say

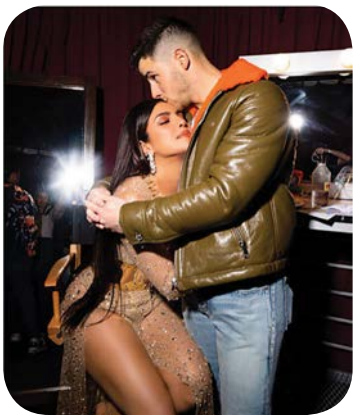
reader's reviews, box-office, celebrity column & more

INSTA LIKE

Medley of moments

Check out the best Instagram posts of the stars from recent times

@priyankachopra: Husband appreciation post 😍 Not even a cracked rib can stop this force of nature. So proud of you baby. With everything you do! Your work ethic, your pursuit of excellence! You inspire me everyday! Crushed it today! I love you so much!



Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Nick Jonas live in happily-ever-after valley.

@tahirakashyap: Also all things I like! (Part 2) Chai, kitaab, lamp, study table, rain and this hot boy 😍@ayushmannk

A cup of tea, books to read and thee...

Readers send in their feedback pg 56

Shatrughan Sinha's racy rejoinders pg 58

@kalkikanmani: Yeh hafta kitna mushkil tha, oho.

Sappho is having a tough week, but her pictures are keeping the smile bright on mother Kalki's face.

@bhumipednekar: Things are tough, but this too shall pass :) it's been a while so just some♡

Bhumi Pednekar is a rebel ready to take on the world with her never-say-die attitude.

@parineetichopra: Thankful. Happy. Blessed. 🌸 The industry and fans have given me unending appreciation for #SandeepAurPinkyFaraar #TheGirlOnTheTrain #Saina. Old days are back again. Thankyou reviewers, thankyou audiences. 📸

Parineeti Chopra basks in sunshine as she revels in the critcial success of her films.

IN THE MAIL

READERS WRITE AND BITE BACK... WITH LOVE AND AFFECTION

Action man: Akshay Kumar

1st Prize ₹1500

KHILADI KUMAR IN *DOSTANA 2*?

I read on *Filmfare's* website that Akshay Kumar might star in *Dostana 2* and couldn't believe my eyes. Kartik Aaryan to Akshay Kumar is a drastic change indeed. I hope that it's not just a rumour as I am a huge Akshay Kumar fan. Though I feel they need to recast other actors as well if Akshay comes on board as I'm not sure he'll fit in well with Janhvi Kapoor. That said, this is Bollywood, so anything can happen. Thanks for bringing all the news from Bollywood to us.

Devyani Singh, Jalandar

Too hot to handle: Sunny Leone

SUNNY LEONE TESTING NEW WATERS

I really adore Sunny Leone but I feel that she should stick to roles that are more on the glamorous side. I have my doubts about her doing justice to her role in a historical horror drama, as was reported in your magazine (May).

Jatin Sachdeva, New Delhi

2st Prize ₹1000

RANBIR KAPOOR'S GOOD NATURE

I read a story published in the May issue about Ranbir Kapoor getting excited about Shah Rukh Khan and Rajkumar Hirani's collaboration and spreading the good word in the industry. We keep hearing how it's a dog-eat-dog world out there in the film industry and then come across something heartwarming like this. Ranbir not only is a superb actor, he's a great human being as well. Hat's off to his good nature.

Preeti Das, Kolkata

Cool No 1: Ranbir Kapoor

TAAPSEE PANNU'S ON A ROLL

Taapsee Pannu has emerged as one of the leading lights of the new-age Bollywood brigade. She's impressed one and all through her performances and has managed to push the envelope with every role she's done. She's one of my favourites and I'm looking forward to her releases once the lockdown is over.

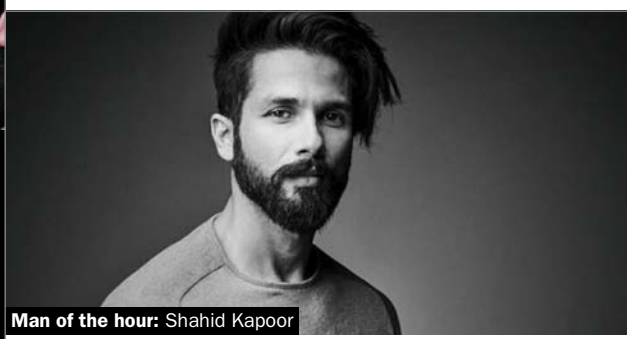
Kirti Iyer, Chennai

Girl power: Taapsee Pannu

FARHAN AKHTAR'S A MARVEL

I read a story in *Filmfare* (May) that Farhan Akhtar has started shooting for a film with Marvel Studios. That's really huge not only for the super talented actor and director but also for the entire industry. Hollywood is finally casting actors from different ethnic backgrounds and I'd love to see the likes of Hrithik Roshan or Shah Rukh Khan in international projects as well.

Bunty Arora, Chandigarh



Man of the hour: Shahid Kapoor

MUCH IN DEMAND SHAHID KAPOOR

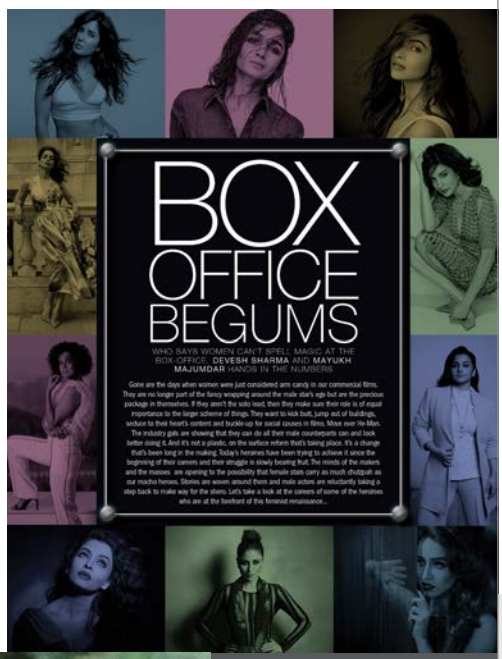
The news in your last issue (May) about Shashank Khaitan waiting for Shahid Kapoor to re-pitch *Yoddha* to him, once Shahid wraps up shooting for his other projects was quite interesting. We would love to see Shahid in a hugely-mounted actioner for sure. We'e waiting with bated breath for his Raj and DK series to premiere.

Rakesh Saxena, Jaipur

WHO RUNS THE WORLD? GIRLS!

I loved the way *Filmfare* compiled their cover story for the May issue. It was simply awesome to learn that our heroines not only are getting good roles but are also getting paid more. This success needs to be celebrated. You guys have done an adorable job of pulling up women who matter and acquainting us with their success stories. Thanks for the insightful article.

Vandana Mehta, Mumbai



KABIR BEDI UNPLUGGED

I've always admired Kabir Bedi's personality and was surprised to find out so many new things about him in his interview in *Filmfare* (May). He's actually gone through a lot in life but hasn't let the twists and turns get to him. He must be admired for his positivity. Thank you *Filmfare* for the candid interview. I'll surely buy his autobiography to know more about him.

Anant Reddy, Hyderabad

Just one Point

Joy to behold: Neetu Kapoor

Watched Neetu Kapoor's interview on your Instagram page on Mother's Day, it was delightful.
Vinit Maurya, Lucknow

The Joy Filmfare Awards Bangla looked so grand and well-planned. Keep up the good work, guys.
Manushri Dutt, Bengaluru

Bong beauties: Ishaa Saha, Madhumita Sarcar and Sauraseni Maitra

The coverage of the Filmfare Awards Bangla in the magazine was as good as its television screening.
Rajiv Bhattacharya, Kolkata

Filmfare's digital space helps me keep a close watch on all updates regarding Bollywood. Thanks guys.
Anamika Rai, Baroda

Loving *Filmfare*'s digital space as it is changing with the times and also helping people during the pandemic.
Bikram Singh, New Delhi

OTT bound: Ajay Devgn

HINDI REMAKE OF *LUTHER?*

It felt great to hear that the Hindi remake of the hit UK series *Luther,* starring Idris Alba, will be remade in Hindi with Ajay Devgn in the lead role. I'm an admirer of both Alba and Devgn and have great faith in the latter's ability to do full justice to the role. Can't wait for it to come out.

Jatin Garg, Ratlam

Dapper as ever: Kabir Bedi

BEST OF JOY FILMFARE AWARDS BANGLA

The details about the Filmfare Awards Bangla in your last issue (May) were a an interesting read. I'm a huge fan of Bengali movies and stars and it was fun looking at the pics of all the winners and reading about what happened at the awards. I believe Bengali cinema makes some of the best films and kudos to *Filmfare* for recognising that and coming up with a separate property to honour excellence in Bangla cinema.

Nandini Sen, Assam

Bangla winnners: Jaya Ahsan, Subashree Ganguly, Srijit Mukherji, Prosenjit Chatterjee

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PHOTOGRAPH: MEETESH TANEJA

Shatrughan Sinha's Rapid fire

The greatest showman: Raj Kapoor

Do the terms boyfriend and girlfriend sound frivolous to you?

Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North), West Bengal

In spite of my marital status and despite the overall restrictions and prevailing conditions, the term girlfriend still sounds very attractive and desirable. In fact, more the merrier.

Why was the great Raj Kapoor called The Showman?

Amit Jain, New Delhi

He was indeed a showman because he proved himself to be ahead of his times. Those who study him today know that his kind of creativity can only be the creativity of a showman and/ or a cinematic genius. His understanding of cinema, his creativity and presentation on screen remains marvellous. Not forgetting his understanding and great taste for music. And he also had an eye for talent and was instrumental in introducing so many people. Thus, he rightly and truly remains the showman.

Do you think the convenience of technology is worth the loss of privacy that comes with it ?

Subhash Chand, Chandigarh

Yes indeed it is. One should always weigh the risk versus the benefits. Everything comes with its pros and cons. Lose some to gain some.

What is something you've done that you wish you could undo?

Pankaj Goyal, Ambala

The hurt caused to some friends, I wish I could undo that. And like most married people, I too have thoughts of magically undoing my marriage and going back to the bachelor state. But it's too late for that now...

Is coronavirus a punishment for becoming too materialistic and forgetting humanity?

Santosh Mohan Joshi, Miraj

If you take it from the karmic point of view, definitely nature and God seem to be punishing us for becoming too materialistic and forgetting humanity. Hopefully, we should collectively learn a lesson from it and do something about it.

Why do we just wish for rest in peace, and why not for living in peace?

Vinod Behl, Gurgaon

Some of us do send wishes, saying, have a peaceful life but the problem is life and peace don't go together. Have you ever seen any living person living peacefully? Not even our yoga gurus are peaceful nowadays.

Can one love and still be wise?

Vinod Behl, Gurgaon

Wisdom and love don't go with each other. Indeed...we won't make the blunders we generally make when in love if we were wise.

Will COVID-19 lead to the end of the human race or will the pandemic end one day?

Santosh Mohan Joshi, Miraj

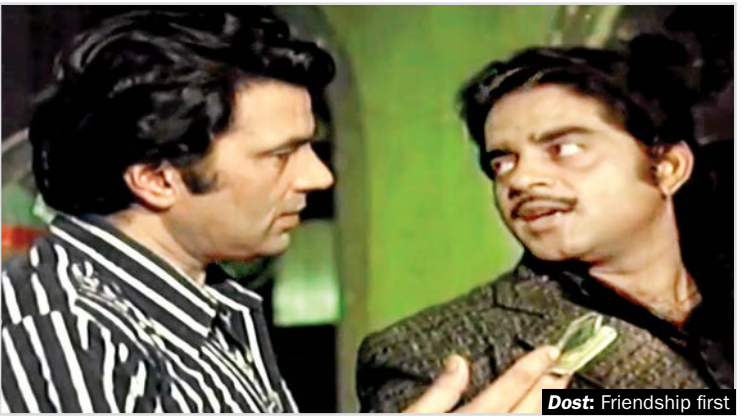
I think it'll end one day and the sooner the better. Certainly this too shall

---

Why are politicians not following corona rules?

Santosh Mohan Joshi, Miraj

Politicians consider themselves as demigods. They generally think no one can destroy them. It's what money, arrogance and power can do to a human being, especially to a politician. They always consider themselves above all and of course above the law. Haven't you seen them recently addressing political rallies. Or allowing *Kumbh Mela* to happen? When have you known them to be law-abiding citizens?



Dost: Friendship first

pass. Maintaining a new normal of living standards by following COVID-19 guidelines and protocols could be our new way of life.

Are you stubborn or flexible and easy-going by nature?

Choodamani Vasudevan, Chennai

I'm basically chilled out with no demands, no commands, no complaints and no expectations… In short, a simple and easy going person. However, when provoked you may find me to be difficult and inflexible.

With lockdown and more time to spend with family, has bonding with your family brought new changes in your life.

Preetha Rengaswamy, Chennai

Remember, every cloud has a silver lining. So I've a new perspective on life. It's far too precious and needs to be cherished. Good changes have definitely come in my life and like they have for all us we must cultivate, remember and enjoy them.

Why are men less affectionate than women ?

Seema Sabharwal, Chandigarh

Women are far more emotional, sensitive, caring and lovable than men -- and also more practical, realistic and forthright.

Will we ever have a peaceful world?

Subhash Chand, Chandigarh

Not in my lifetime my friend and not even in God's lifetime.

In the film *Dost* you had said in a song sequence that *Is gareebi mein badi mauj karata hai apan.* However, even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over, will it be possible for the poor to enjoy in any way?

Anil R Torne, Pune

Cinema isn't always realistic or relatable. This pandemic has been traumatic, devastating and painful for everyone. More so for our poor families. It could be a long wait before anyone can really enjoy it in a real way.

Why is a relationship always hard to sustain?

Dr Devki Yadav, Ratlam

A lot goes into maintaining any relationship. We need a lot of trust, patience and compassion to make it work. It's a difficult task indeed.

In most of your films, you have sacrificed your love for the sake of friendship. Is it ever possible in real life?

Shabina Begum, Kolkata

As I said earlier, reel life is different from real life. Love, emotions, true friendship is only found on the screen. Real life generally goes for topsy turvy or for a full toss in the cinema world.

If God is spiritual how did he create a physical universe?

Dhawal Sahani, Bhilai

You'd have to ask God. I'm not that friendly with him to answer such personal topics

Will 2022 see us free of the coronavirus?

Swadha Pant, Bhopal

We can only hope, wish and pray for a happy and a healthy new year.

(Feature co-ordinated by DEVESH SHARMA)

Please note: The column doesn't reflect Shatrughan Sinha's political or personal views. His answers are given in jest and humour.

1st Prize

What do you value more - love, lust or longing?

Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North), West Bengal

Longing desperately for turning lust into love.

2nd Prize

What is your greatest achievement in life ?

Prafulla Kumar Tripathi, Lucknow

Besides quitting smoking/tobacco for good, my being married and building a loving, cohesive family...

Win!
CASH PRIZES

1st prize ₹3000

2nd prize ₹2000

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YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE FORWARDED TO: Shatrughan Sinha, who insists his answers do not reflect his political and social views.

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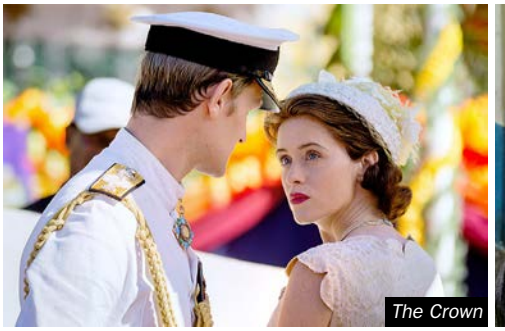
ESCAPE FROM REALITY


The Crown

The Family Man

Gilmore Girls

Scam 1992

This Is Us

The coronavirus pandemic and the resultant lockdown have been traumatic to say the least. Everyday, we hear of someone or the other either battling it or wore still succumbing to it. People are dying because of the lack of oxygen, lack of treatment, or medicine. The crematoriums have run out of space and bodies are being thrown in the rivers, buried on riverbanks. The livelihood of millions have been affected and the economy is said to be in complete doldrum. Thanks to the constant lockdown, we've been consigned to our homes for a large part of last year. This year too the situation seems to be the same. We can't even grieve properly as even going to meet someone who has lost a loved one is fraught with its own dangers. We're yet to account for the mental health woes caused by this state of affairs.

I've stopped watching the news and have been staying away from social media as it's depressing. The one thing that has helped me in overcoming the mental fatigue are the OTT shows. I confess I wasn't much of a TV watcher before the pandemic. My interest was always in films and I used to watch films of different languages on a regular basis. But the lockdown has turned me into a binge watcher of serials. I got hooked onto *The Crown,* the drama series about the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Its well-researched adaptation of the life of the British Royals, apt casting and true-to-life acting blew my mind away. It's easily one of the best series I have seen in my entire life.

I came late to the *Gilmore Girls* party but I'm glad I did. Millions have been hooked about this series which is primarily about mother-daughter relationships and secondarily about family. One of its themes is that if your family doesn't like the way you want to lead your life, then have the courage to leave them and carve your own life. But that doesn't mean that you should cut off all ties with them. We all share dysfunctional relationships with our relatives and this series brings all that to life and more. Plus, it teaches you to face everything with courage and positivity and we all need to be reminded of that currently. It's also sprinkled with a fine dash of humour that has a natural flow. Another series revolving around family, which has affected me hugely is *This Is Us*. It's more sombre in nature and deals with contemporary issues. A humane tale runs across its complex plot and characters and makes you feel you're peeking into the lives of people you know.

Scam 1992 was something I enjoyed and something which I consider would be loved by audiences worldwide as it deals with the universal themes of greed and corruption. I'm not a big fan of the thriller genre but *The Family Man* intrigues me as apart from the action, it also deals with the inner lives of those involved. These were some of my go-to titles. Let me know about yours as well...

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